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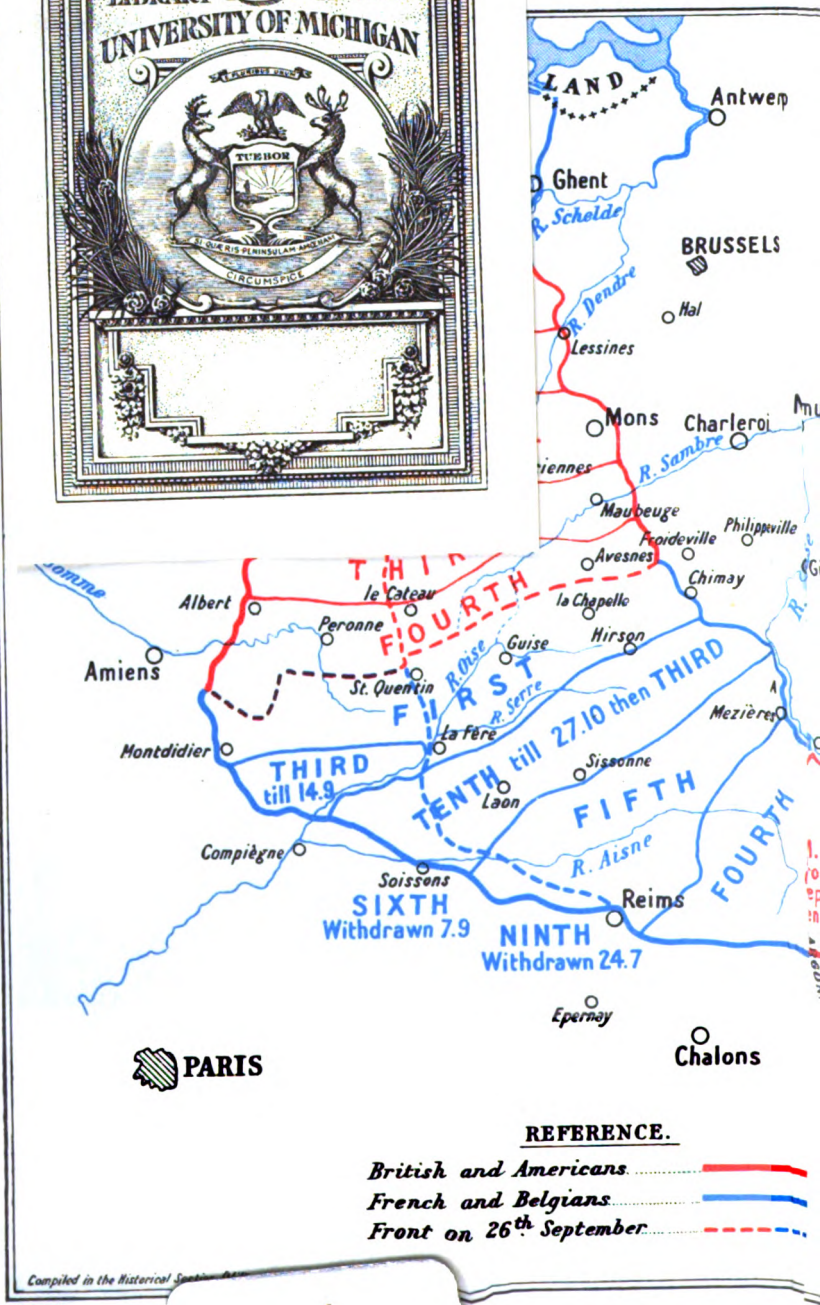

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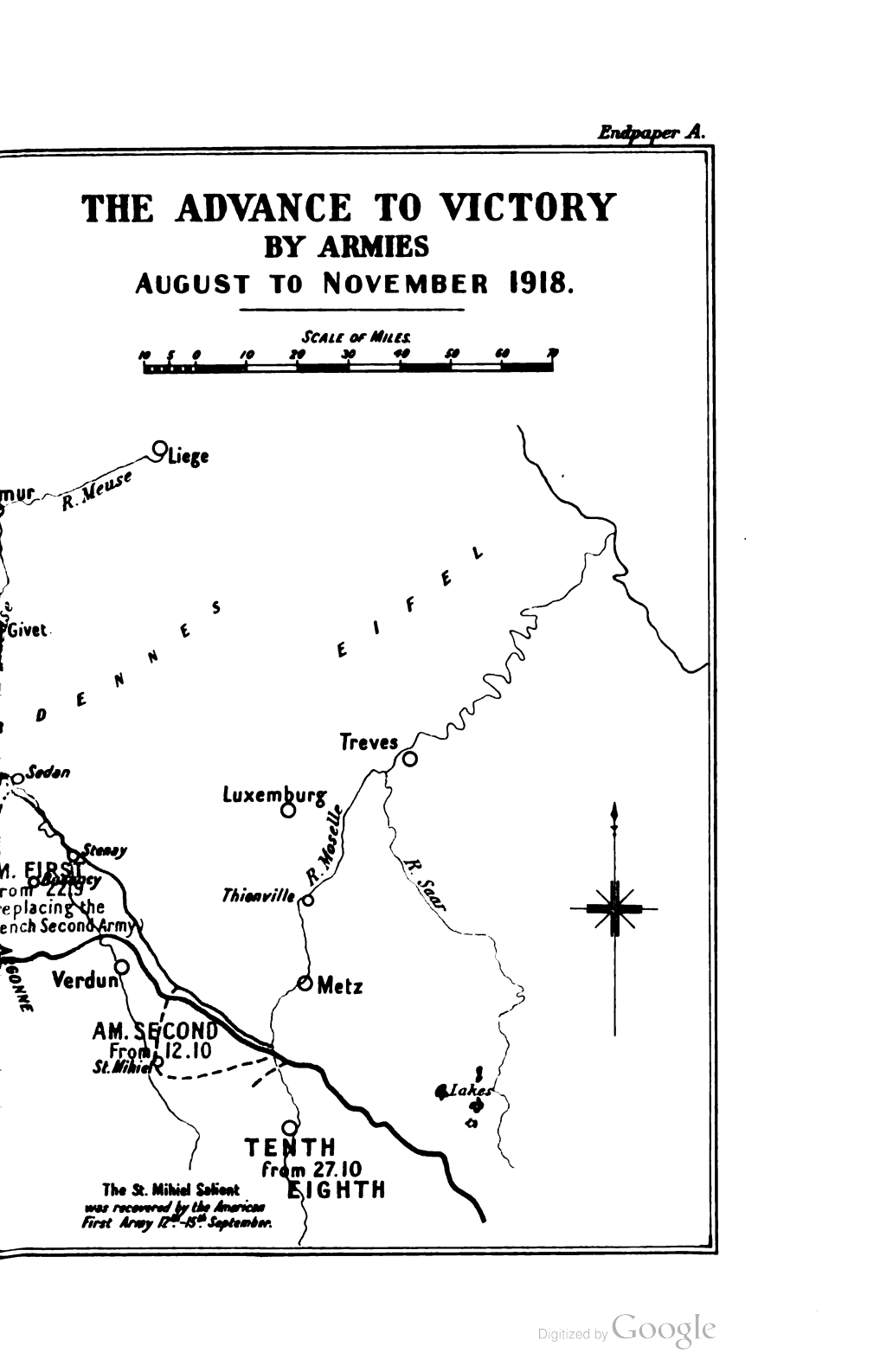

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THE BRITISH ADVANCE TO VICTORY
8th Aug.—11th Nov. 1918.

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" " 31st "	" " 27th–29th Sept.
" " 14th Oct.	" " 17th–20th Oct. — 17 Oct. —
" " 4th–8th Nov. — 4 —	Armistice " — 11 —
Intermediate Lines	German Defence Lines

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HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR

BASED ON OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS
BY DIRECTION OF THE HISTORICAL SECTION OF THE
COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE

MILITARY OPERATIONS FRANCE AND BELGIUM 1918

VOLUME V

26th SEPTEMBER — 11th NOVEMBER
THE ADVANCE TO VICTORY

Compiled by
BRIGADIER-GENERAL SIR JAMES E. EDMONDS, C.B., C.M.G.
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MAJOR-GENERAL H. R. DAVIES, C.B.

took part in the compilation of the first draft of this volume.

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PREFACE

This volume deals with the period 26th September to 11th November, 1918, the final phase of the War on the Western Front. In these seven weeks the greatest advance of the War both in breadth and depth was achieved.[1] For the first time in the War all the Allied Armies on the Western Front from the Meuse to the sea were on the move together, and they continued advancing, with short intermissions, either attacking or pursuing, until the end. Previous offensives, like that of the Somme 1916, the Chemin des Dames (General Nivelle's), with Arras-Vimy as subsidiary, in April, 1917, and Third Ypres July–November, 1917, to mention only the more important, had been, so to say, isolated operations, and the enemy had thus been able to concentrate large forces and employ substantial reserves to parry them. Now he was attacked everywhere at once, was forced to disperse his reserves, and, although the Allied margin of numerical superiority was not very great, he was, in the result, nowhere strong enough to hold his ground.

The great final offensive began with four heavy blows on four successive days: on the right, from the left centre, on the left, and from the right centre. The American First Army and the French Fourth Army led off on the 26th September between the Meuse and Reims; on the 27th the second blow was delivered by the British Third Army and the right of the First Army in the Cambrai sector; on the 28th the British Second Army and the Belgian Army, with a few French divisions (later organized as a new French Sixth Army), came into the battle, in Flanders; on the 29th September, the British Fourth Army and French First Army assaulted the Hindenburg Position established behind the St. Quentin canal. The left of the British First Army with the Fifth Army acted as link between the left centre and the left attacks, and the French Fifth and Tenth (later called the Third) Armies as link between the right centre and

[1] *See* End-paper A.

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the right attacking groups. All these twelve Armies and an American Second Army (organized in October thus extending the active front to the Moselle) formed one fighting front, and they gradually drove the Germans back, the success of one group of Armies, and the consequent enemy retirement in front of it, often facilitating the advance of another group.

For the purposes of the narrative the operations of the British Armies can conveniently be divided into three main parts: the principal one, that of the southern group carried out by the Fourth and Third Armies and the right of the First; the second, the separate offensive of the Second Army; and the third, the advance of the connecting link, the left of the First Army and the Fifth Army. This link from time to time also co-operated in the battles of its neighbours on the right and left. To complete the story, the operations of the American, French and Belgian Armies are described shortly in Notes at the end of the various chapters, or, if very closely connected with British actions, in the text. Relevant matter, as regards what was going on behind the enemy front and the political events preceding the German collapse, are also given in Notes at the end of Chapters or in footnotes.

A skeleton Order of Battle of corps and divisions only has been provided; fuller details can be found in the "Order of Battle" volumes already published.

In dealing with such large forces it was impossible within a reasonable space either to enter into much detail or to mention every unit engaged; the scale of the narrative had to be different from that of the earlier volumes. In very many cases, however, when a division was ordered to attack it detailed a brigade, and the brigade sent forward one or more battalions, and in such cases the action of small units must necessarily receive notice. The details of the passages of rivers in the face of the enemy also seemed to deserve description. As artillery support was all important, endeavour has been made to name at least the brigades (now called regiments) which were engaged. It must be borne in mind that preparation of a barrage in 1918 was not the simple matter it had been in the preceding years: the position of the infantry front line was often doubtful, communication with the brigades and batteries was, as a rule, by mounted messenger, not by telephone, and the

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ammunition had to be brought up during the night and was not unlimited owing to transport difficulties.[1]

To say much about machine guns and trench mortars was, on the scale of the narrative, nearly impossible; it must be assumed that they always gave full assistance, at least in the barrages. The early employment of tanks, being of special interest, such details as could be extracted from the diaries have been interpolated, sometimes in brackets, in the text. The operations of the air force have been related in a separate history, so only sufficient has been said to remind the reader of its existence; the exact assistance it gave has been difficult to ascertain and to fit in, as the Army diaries say little about it, and the air reports go into no great detail. I have to thank Mr J. C. Nerney, formerly of the Historical Section (Air Branch) and now Librarian of the Air Ministry, for furnishing information which I could not find in the Air History.

The operations as they appear on paper are, and indeed were, of a monotonous character. They were a gigantic "drive" across country by a great line of Armies, and the advance was hindered not only by the enemy's fire—mainly from his machine guns—and his demolitions, but also by entire ignorance, except from the map, of the ground, seamed with rivers, canals and dykes, and by the uncertainty of the position and strength of the enemy, and whether the opposition came from rear guards or from a line meant to be held. They were handicapped by fog and by fatigue and by the usual difficulties of the supply of advancing troops. Further, the checking of one division or brigade often entailed the halt of others, for fear of exposing their flanks; on the other hand the advance out of the line of one part

[1] Artillery officers have complained of former volumes that very little has been said about the guns. The reply to this is that neither the war diaries (it is well known that the nights of the gunners were spent in calculating barrages and getting ammunition, if not guns also, forward), nor the comments on the draft text, have been helpful. In the present period, though little happened without artillery support and sections of guns were taken forward most gallantly, the diary of one divisional artillery gives only the places of headquarters and references to the operation orders issued; another is full of blanks—no entry whatever for 5th–10th November; others record corps and divisional movements rather than artillery action. The brigade diaries (battery diaries do not exist) rarely give the positions of the batteries, the time in action or the number of rounds fired. In many cases, therefore, little more can be recorded in the text than the order of battle and whether barrages were or were not fired.

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often materially assisted others. Whether the operations had the purpose of driving the enemy from his carefully organized positions, like the Hindenburg Front, Support and Reserve Positions, the Drocourt—Quéant Switch, the Flanders Positions and the Hermann Positions; or from river lines like the Somme, the Canal du Nord, the Selle, the Schelde and the Sambre—Oise canal, or of turning him out of defended localities and improvised lines, the procedure was the same: an attack meant the advance of parties of infantry, sometimes assisted by tanks, under a barrage. In the final stage of the operations, when the enemy was retiring rapidly, he was followed up by advanced guards which were generally tied to the roads.

The feature of the German defence was the tenacity of the machine-gunners and sections of field guns arranged in depth. It was impossible for the artillery to obliterate all of these. To evade the devastating effect of the enemy machine guns, attacks were usually made before dawn—a time unfavourable, however, for tanks on unknown ground—and the length of the original advance was as often as not limited by the range which the original barrage could cover. It is regretted that the reports of casualties are irregular, so that it is difficult to estimate the cost in life of all the various actions.

In the circumstances, the narrative of the fighting is little more than an outline of the movements by which divisions and brigades reached the ever-advancing lines marking the daily progress which are shown in the sketches.[1]

A general idea of the campaign which should serve as a good introduction to the text can be gathered from the sketches. End-paper A shows the general advance of the Allies; the frontispiece shows in greater detail the advance of the British Armies.

[1] The morning positions shown on the map are only approximate. The maps in the diaries show the objectives, but rarely the line gained, although this is sometimes defined by map co-ordinates. Unless, therefore, the line at night was on an objective, it was usually necessary to work it out from the subordinate diaries. To give an instance of the difficulties: on 8th November, what in a divisional diary is given as the 2 p.m. line is recorded in the corps and Army diaries as the night line; but the divisional diary goes on "advance continues along the whole divisional front. No "touch on right". The diary of the brigade which formed the advanced guard is missing, and those of the two leading battalions say "advanced "west of X" and "consolidated 500 yards east of Y Wood", which would place the night line half a mile behind the supposed 2 p.m. line.

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The stumbling in the mud and darkness, the cries and curses of the excited troops and the roar of the barrage must be imagined. Noise and darkness, either natural or artificial, were the features of the fighting. It must be borne in mind too, throughout, that in daylight the battle-fields themselves seemed nearly empty; for it was fatal for either bodies of troops or tanks to be seen, and little of the artillery could be moved forward until the infantry had made a substantial advance.

Attention is drawn to the casualty statistics for the whole war given in the last chapter, which show that no less than 82 per cent. of the wounded returned to duty, 64 per cent. to duty in the front line.

The private letter of 18th October from Field Marshal Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, commanding the Group of Armies opposed to the British, to Prince Max of Baden, then the Chancellor, which is printed in translation at the end of Chapter XXI (Note II) leaves no doubt that the German army and its leaders were by then beaten both physically and morally, and, as the Vice-Chancellor von Payer had summed up, were trying "by negotiation to avoid capitulation."

Having acquired a military mind I should have liked to have made the narrative symmetrical, giving the same particulars for every division, especially the casualties and the prisoners taken; but these were not always to be found in the diaries, and cannot now be discovered.[1] The diaries, even of the Armies, vary greatly; some divisional diaries, for instance, contain narratives, others little more than the orders issued and information received. One battalion, whose position at night was of importance, recorded it as "Chant de l'Oiseau": now there are villages of this name, but in the particular instance it was the name of an estaminet (not marked even on the 1 : 40,000 map).

The higher strategy of the final campaign, and the tactics are discussed in "reflections" at the close of the volume.

[1] Such casualties as are given are "gross", that is, they include men absent at roll call who subsequently returned. To obtain the exact casualties, as pointed out in the preface to "1916" Volume I, the Part II orders for every unit would have to be examined. This was done for one day, 1st July, 1916, for the infantry only, and the investigation took a member of the staff of the Section six months.

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Some readers may prefer to look at these remarks before tackling the narrative, as they afford a good clue to the happenings.

The final retrospect has been limited to the indication of the principal points on which success and failure depended, and to matters misunderstood by the public at the time owing to lack of data which had to be withheld lest they might be of profit to the enemy.

For reasons of paper economy the first draft of the concluding chapters has been circulated to fewer combatants than usual. To those who kindly read the chapters I offer my sincere thanks; but the remarks made in September, 1939, in the Preface to " 1917 " Volume I, apply now with additional force. Time has since then further reduced the number of friends available: nearly every day brings the notice of the death of one or more of the combatants of 1914–18, and the recollections of those who remain are no longer as vivid as they once were; further, it would seem that events in the earlier part of the War made greater impression than did later adventures.

I have specially to thank Colonel A. Fortescue Duguid, D.S.O., R.C.A., the Canadian Official Historian, who read the portion of the narrative dealing with the operations of the Canadian forces and circulated it for remarks to senior combatants. As regards the Australian troops, Dr. C. E. W. Bean, M.A., LL.D., the Australian Official Historian, not only sent me an advance copy of his chapters covering the end of the War, but also furnished corrections to my draft.

" The Story of the Fourth Army in the ' Battle of the Hundred Days, August 8th to November 11th, 1918,' by Major-General (now Field Marshal) Sir Archibald Montgomery(-Massingberd), chief General Staff officer of that Army, published in 1919, before the records were organized, has been of considerable value.

For the French part of the narrative, the French Official Account, Tome VII, Volume II, with its maps and appendices, has been followed. For the Belgian operations, Major-General Vantrooyen, the Chief of the Belgian General Staff, kindly furnished me with a typewritten narrative. For the American operations the basis has been the Official Report and " My Experiences in the World War " by General J. J. Pershing, the Official " Orders of Battle of the United

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States Land Forces in the World War", "American Armies and Battlefields in Europe", and other books. The completed narrative has kindly been checked by the U.S. General Staff.

The German Official History of the Western Front in 1918 has not yet been published, and no official monographs on the period dealt with are available, the last one of the series being "Die Katastrophe des 8 August 1918"; but sufficient material for an account of the principal orders and movements has been found in the books of General Ludendorff, Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, who commanded the Group of Armies opposite the British (excluding the Fourth Army) and the Belgians, General von Kuhl (Rupprecht's Chief of the Staff), General von Lossberg (Chief of the Staff of General von Boehn's Group of Armies, opposite the French First and British Fourth Armies), General Schwarte's history, and the short Bavarian Official History; but in most of them, even in the regimental histories, a veil of discreet silence is thrown over the last days. For the political history the memoirs of Prince Max of Baden and a number of minor personalities furnished ample material. For the identification of the German divisions on the British front, as there are few divisional histories, the British Intelligence Summary of Information formed the basis, but it was checked by the regimental histories and found almost invariably correct.

One of the many German excuses for defeat has been that, owing to casualties, the infantry units were very weak; but the number of machine guns per division certainly did not decrease; the fire-power of a division, indeed, actually increased. The infantry units, however, having been "milked" nearly dry of intelligent men in order to organize and maintain specialist units, machine-gun companies, anti-tank riflemen, light trench-mortar sections, shock detachments, signallers and such like, what remained as pure infantry was of small value and formed the bulk of the prisoners. All excuses for defeat have been swept aside by Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, who wrote in the last days of the War: "no longer can full reliance be placed "on hitherto dependable troops. . . . As a rule, when "attacked, troops give way and retire. . . . On our side the "artillery does best. It forms the backbone of the fighting "front, but guns must be left behind in every retirement

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" from lack of horses. . . . A long resistance is possible no " more." The German Army was in fact beaten and on the eve of dissolution.

Throughout the work of compilation of the histories I have had the invaluable aid of Mr. W. Y. Baldry, O.B.E., the late Librarian of the War Office: he has drawn my attention to new foreign and English books which had a bearing on the War, and has looked up and verified many references for me.

The names of the officers who assisted me in the very laborious task of compiling the first draft of the British operations are printed on the title page and on the page opposite it; I have also received very great assistance from other members of the staff of the Historical Section, particularly from Captain W. Miles, Mr. A. W. Tarsey and Mr. H. Burge who has drawn the maps and sketches, often from very rough material. I have had the benefit of the invaluable criticism of Mr. C. T. Atkinson, M.A. (Oxon.) and Major-General Sir Henry Thuillier, K.C.B., C.M.G.

Corrections received from all sources after publication have been issued as " Addenda and Corrigenda " in each successive volume. They have not been very numerous, and have related, as will be seen, to minor details; so it may be claimed that the story told, thus amended, is substantially correct.

All officers interested may not have seen the draft or proofs. I beg, therefore, as I have done in previous volumes, that any corrections or additions or criticisms thought necessary may be sent to the Secretary of the Historical Section, Cabinet Office, Great George Street, Westminster, S.W.1.

December, 1945. J.E.E.

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NOTES

THE location of troops and places is written from right to left of the front of the Allied Forces, unless otherwise stated ; in translations from the German the order is as in the original ; otherwise enemy troops are enumerated like the British. Where roads which run through both the British and German lines are described by the names of towns or villages, the place in British hands is mentioned first, thus : " Albert–Bapaume road ".

To save space and bring the nomenclature in line with " Division ", " Infantry Brigade " has in the text been abbreviated to " Brigade ", as distinguished from " Cavalry Brigade " and " Artillery Brigade " ; " Regiment " similarly means " Infantry Regiment ".

The convention observed in the British Expeditionary Force is followed as regards the distinguishing numbers of Armies, Corps, Divisions, etc., of the British and Allied Armies, *e.g.*, they are written in full for Armies, in Roman figures for corps, and in Arabic for smaller formations and units, except Artillery Brigades, which are Roman, but for artillery brigades with numbers higher than one hundred, Arabic figures are used ; thus : Fourth Army, IV. Corps, 4th Cavalry Division, 4th Division, 4th Cavalry Brigade, 4th Brigade, IV Brigade R.F.A.

German formations and units, to distinguish them clearly from the Allies, are printed in italic characters, thus : *First Army, I. Corps, 1st Division.*

The usual Army abbreviations of regimental names have been used : for example, " 2/R. West Kent " or " West Kent " for 2nd Battalion The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment ; K.O.Y.L.I. for the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry ; K.R.R.C. for the King's Royal Rifle Corps. To avoid constant repetition, the " Royal " in regimental titles is sometimes omitted. To economize space the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division, the 14th (Light) Division, etc., are usually described by their numbers only.[1]

First-line and Second-line Territorial Force units are distinguished by a figure in front of the battalion or other number, thus : 1/8th London, 2/8th London, 1/3rd London or 2/3rd London Field Company R.E., or, when the First-line and Second-line had been amalgamated, simply 3/London ; but in the case of First-line units the figure in front of the battalion number is sometimes omitted.

[1] The Yorkshire Regiment is usually called in the text by its ancient name " The Green Howards ".

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Abbreviations employed occasionally are :

B.E.F. for British Expeditionary Force ;
G.A.C. for Groupe d'armées du Centre ;
G.A.E. for Groupe d'armées de l'Est ;
G.A.F. for Groupe d'armées des Flandres ;
G.A.N. for Groupe d'Armées du Nord ;
G.A.R. for Groupe d'armées de Réserve ;
G.H.Q. for British General Headquarters ;
G.Q.G. for French Grand Quartier-Général (usually spoken as " Grand Q.G.") ;
O.H.L. for German Oberste Heeresleitung (German Supreme Command). *N.B.* " G.H.Q." in German means Grosses Haupt-Quartier, that is the Kaiser's Headquarters, political, military and naval, as distinguished from O.H.L.

Officers are described by the rank which they held at the period under consideration. To save space the initials instead of the Christian names of knights are generally used.

The German pre-war practice of writing the plain name without " von ", when it is applicable, and no rank or title is prefixed, has been adopted, *e.g.*, " Falkenhayn " and not " von Falkenhayn ".

German Summer Time ended during the night of the 15th/16th September and British Summer Time on the night of the 5th/6th October ; in the period covered by this volume, therefore, up to the later date the clock times were the same, after it German time was one hour ahead of British time.

The use of the margins being forbidden by war restrictions, map references have been given in footnotes and not as heretofore.

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Sketches

The operations described in this volume covered a large area of ground both in frontage and depth ; to include maps of only the part traversed by the British troops would, on the 1 : 100,000 scale, require fifteen sheets. The interest of the story, apart from the forcing of river lines, lies in the progress made rather than in the ground and the tactics employed, and it seems probable that only the general features of the campaign will be studied. It was, therefore, decided to provide a large number of sketch-maps bound in the text, to show the advance of the five Armies, and no large scale layered maps as was the case with some of the previous volumes. Sketches have been added to show the progress of the Allied Armies which affected British operations.

It should be noted that on the sketches showing the position of French troops reproduced by reduction from the French Official account, the date marked on a line of advance gives the position reached at the *end* of that day, whereas the same date on sketches showing the British operations would show the line at about 8 a.m. on that day.

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[1] All dates are in 1918.

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1.	26th September : Situation and Plan ..	*At end of*
2.	American–French Advance, 26th September–3rd October	*Volume* ,, ,,
3.	G.H.Q. Orders of 22nd September	,, ,,
4.	First Army : Operations of the Right Wing 27th September–7th October	,, ,,
5.	First Army : Operations of the Left Wing 2nd–7th October	,, ,,
6.	Third Army, 27th September–7th October	,, ,,
7.	Flanders Offensive, 28th September–2nd October	,, ,,
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19.	First Army : Centre and Left 19th October	
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25.	Fourth Army, 17th–19th October	,, ,,
26.	French First Army, 15th–31st October ..	,, ,,
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28.	First Army, 20th–31st October	,, ,,
29.	Fourth Army, 23rd–24th October	,, ,,
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31.	Fifth Army, 14th–31st October	,, ,,

[1] All dates are in 1918.

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		At end of Volume
32.	Second Army, 20th–27th October	,, ,,
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...rth Army Operation Order of the 5th October for the ...ffensive of the 8th October, 1918.

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LIST OF BOOKS

TO WHICH MOST FREQUENT REFERENCE IS MADE

A.O.A. (Australian Official Account): "Official History of Australia in the Great War 1914–18. Volume VI. The A.I.F. in France: May, 1918–Armistice" by Dr. C. E. W. Bean, M.A., Litt.D. (Australia: Angus and Robertson), published in 1942 in the interval between the compilation of the present volume and its being sent to press.

B.O.A. (BAVARIAN OFFICIAL ACCOUNT): "Die Bayern im Grossen Kriege." Published by the Bavarian War Archives. (Munich: Verlag des Bayerischen Kriegsarchivs.)

A useful 600-page summary of the War as it concerned Bavarian formations.

F.O.A. (French Official Account): "Les Armées françaises dans la Grande Guerre." Service Historique. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale.)

Tome VII, Volume II covers the period dealt with in this volume.

GALLWITZ: "Erleben im Westen 1916–18." By General of Artillery M. von Gallwitz. (Berlin: Mittler.)

In 1918 the author was commanding a Group of Armies in the Verdun sector, but his very full diary throws a good deal of light on events elsewhere on the front. He was one of the German generals summoned to the Kaiser's G.H.Q., 27th–29th October, 1918, to report on the state of the troops.

KUHL: "Entstehung, Durchführung und Zusammenbruch der Offensive von 1918." By General of Infantry von Kuhl. (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag.)

A most valuable source. The author was Chief General Staff Officer of Field-Marshal Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria (*see under* "Rupprecht"), and later one of the three technical assistants of the *Reichstag* Commission which enquired into the loss of the War, the book containing the report he made to the Commission.

LOSSBERG: "Meine Tätigkeit im Weltkriege 1914–18." By General of Infantry Fritz von Lossberg.

The author was a great tactician and exponent of the defence in depth. He was Chief of the General Staff of the *XIII.* Corps of the *Third Army* (Champagne, autumn 1915); of the *Second*, *First* (both in the Battles of the Somme), *Sixth* (Arras battle), and *Fourth* (Third Ypres) *Armies*; and in 1918 of Böhn's Group of Armies (*Eighteenth* and *Second Armies*). He died 14th May, 1942, aged 75.

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LUDENDORFF: "My War Memories, 1914–18." By General of Infantry Erich Ludendorff. (Hutchinson & Co.)
Translation of "Meine Kriegserinnerungen 1914–18".

MAX: "Erinnerungen und Dokumente." Translated as "The Memoirs of Prince Max of Baden". (Constable & Co.)
The author was Chancellor of the *Reich* at the time of the Armistice negotiations and relates what happened on the German side at great length.

MONOGRAPH No. 10: "Operations of the 2nd American Corps in the Somme Offensive August 8 to November 11, 1918." Prepared in the Historical Branch, War Plans Division, General Staff. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920.)
This is a very brief account in 40 pages, with the authority for the statements (corps and division orders and reports) in the margin.

MORDACQ: "Le Ministère Clemenceau. Journal d'un témoin." By General Mordacq. (Paris: Plon.)
The author was Chief of the Military Cabinet of M. Clemenceau, the President of the Council of Ministers and Minister of War in 1918. He seldom left the Minister's side, and kept a full diary.

NIEMANN: "Kaiser und Revolution." By Lieut-Colonel Alfred Niemann. (Berlin: Scherl.)
The author was, from 1st August, 1918, the representative of the Chief of the General Staff with the Kaiser, and tells at length the story of the last hundred days.

PERSHING: "My Experiences in the World War." By General John J. Pershing, Commander-in-Chief American Expeditionary Forces. (Hodder & Stoughton.)
General Pershing's own story, founded on his diaries.

REGT. No . . .:
This signifies the regimental history of the German regiment whose number is given.

RUPPRECHT: "Mein Kriegstagebuch." By Field-Marshal Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria. (Munich: Deutscher National Verlag.)
Extracts from the diary of the author, who commanded the Group of Armies (*Seventeenth*, *Sixth* and *Fourth*) between Cambrai (inclusive) and the coast.

SCHWARTE: "Der deutsche Landkrieg." Edited by Lieut.-General M. Schwarte. (Leipzig: Barth.)
A well-known and reliable general history of the War.

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TRANSPORTATION : " Transportation on the Western Front 1914–18 ". By Colonel A. M. Henniker. (H.M. Stationery Office.)
The official volume on the subject.

URKUNDEN : " Urkunden der Oberste Heeresleitung ". Edited by General Erich Ludendorff. (Berlin : Mittler.)
A 700-page collection of the documents of O.H.L., with explanatory text.

WAR IN THE AIR : " The War in the Air ". By H. A. Jones. (Clarendon Press.)
The British Official History : Volume VI has chiefly been consulted.

* *Note* :—Earlier volumes of the Official History of the Great War of 1914–18 : Military Operations, France and Belgium, are quoted as :—
" 1914 " Vol. I, " 1918 " Volume III, etc.

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CALENDAR OF PRINCIPAL EVENTS

Mainly extracted from " Principal Events 1914–18 " compiled by the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, London. His Majesty's Stationery Office. 10*s.* 6*d.* net.

Western Theatre	Other Theatres	Naval Warfare and General Events
	SEPTEMBER 1918	
26th. Franco-American Offensive in Argonne begins. (Battle of Champagne and Argonne.)	26th. *Balkans :* Bulgaria asks for Armistice.	
	26th. *Palestine :* Pursuit through Syria after Battles of Megiddo, begins.	
27th. Third Army offensive begins. (Battle of the Canal du Nord.)		
28th. Allied Offensive in Flanders begins. (Battles of Ypres 1918.)		28th. Hindenburg - Ludendorff demand that an armistice should be obtained.
29th. Fourth Army Offensive begins. (Battle of St. Quentin.)	29th. *East Africa :* German force recrosses Ruvuma into German territory.	30th. Canadian contingent joins North Russian Expeditionary force at Archangel.
	30th. *Balkans :* Hostilities with Bulgaria cease at 12 noon.	30th. Count Hertling, German Chancellor, resigns.
	OCTOBER 1918	
1st. Battle of the Canal du Nord ends.	1st. *Palestine :* Pursuit through Syria continues. Damascus taken.	During this month 25 British merchant ships (gross tonnage, 59,220) were lost by enemy action.

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Western Theatre	Other Theatres	Naval Warfare and General Events
	OCTOBER 1918 (*cont.*)	
	1st. *Balkans :* Advance through Serbia and Albania.	
2nd. Battle of St. Quentin Canal ends. Battle of Ypres 1918 ends.		
3rd. Battle of Beaurevoir Line begins. (Fourth and Third Armies.)		
		4th. Prince Max of Baden becomes German Chancellor. Germany and Austria-Hungary send Notes to President Wilson proposing an Armistice. Ferdinand of Bulgaria abdicates.
5th. Battle of Beaurevoir Line ends.		5th. German Kaiser's Order of the Day informing Army of Peace offer.
8th. Battle of Cambrai 1918 begins. (Third, Fourth and First Armies.)		8th. President Wilson replies to German Note, making evacuation of occupied territory as a first condition.
9th. Battle of Cambrai 1918 ends.		
10th. Battle of Flanders begins.		10th. Irish mail boat " Leinster " sunk by submarine.
	11th. *Balkans :* Nish occupied.	
		12th. Polish National Army recognised by British Government.

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14th.	Battle of Courtrai begins (Second Army).			14th.	Turkey's Note to President Wilson proposing an armistice.
15th.	Battles of Argonne and Champagne end (*see* 26th September).	15th.	*Palestine :* Homs occupied.		
17th.	Battle of the Selle begins (Fourth, Third and First Armies).				
	Ostend (Belgians), Lille and Douai (Fifth Army) reoccupied.				
19th.	Battle of Courtrai ends (*see* 14th).				
				21st.	Czecho-Slovaks declare independence.
		23rd.	*Mesopotamia :* Advance on Mosul begins.		
		24th.	*Italy :* Battle of Vittorio-Veneto begins.		
25th.	Battle of the Selle ends (*see* 17th).				
		26th.	*Palestine :* Aleppo taken.		
		27th.	*Italy :* Austria asks Italy for an armistice.	27th.	General Ludendorff resigns.
		28th.	*Mesopotamia :* Battle of Sharqat begins.		
		30th.	*Palestine and Mesopotamia :* Armistice with Turkey signed. Battle of Sharqat ends. Turkish Army on Tigris surrenders.		

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Western Theatre	Other Theatres	Naval Warfare and General Events
	OCTOBER 1918 (*cont.*)	
	31st. *Palestine and Mesopotamia :* Hostilities with Turkey cease at 12 noon.	31st. Revolution in Vienna and Buda Pest.
	NOVEMBER 1918	
		During the 1st–11th November two British merchant ships (gross tonnage 10,195) were lost by enemy action.
1st. Battle of Valenciennes begins. (First and Third Armies.)	1st. *Balkans :* Belgrade retaken by Serbs.	1st. King Boris of Bulgaria abdicates.
2nd. Battle of Valenciennes ends.	3rd. *Austria - Hungary :* Armistice signed with the Entente.	3rd. Mutiny breaks out in German fleet at Kiel.
4th. Battle of the Sambre begins. (Fouth Army.)	4th. *Austria - Hungary :* Hostilities cease. Battle of Vittorio-Veneto ends (*see* 24th October). *Mesopotamia :* Mosul occupied (*see* 23rd October).	
		5th. President Wilson sends final Note to Germany with Allies' acceptance of armistice terms.

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6th. Sedan taken by U.S. forces.

8th. Maubeuge retaken (VI Corps).

10th. Ghent re-occupied (Belgians).

11th. Mons retaken (Canadian Corps). Armistice signed at 5 a.m. Hostilities cease at 11 a.m.

10th. *Balkans :* Allied forces cross Danube enter Rumania.

14th. *East Africa :* Hostilities cease.

7th. Bavaria proclaimed a republic.

9th. Revolution in Berlin.

10th. Kaiser Wilhelm II crosses frontier into Holland.

21st. German High Seas Fleet arrives at Rosyth *en route* for Scapa Flow.

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CHAPTER I

The Allied Situation and Plans on 26th September

(End-papers A, B; Sketches 1, 2)

In the previous volume was related the victorious advance eastward, between the 8th August and the 26th September, 1918, of the British Fourth, Third and First Armies. Starting from the neighbourhood of Amiens, Albert and Arras[1] they had reached, roughly, the line which the Fifth and Third Armies had occupied before the German offensive of the 21st March, 1918, and were now facing the Hindenburg Position.[2] This advance had been accompanied on the right by the French First Army, whilst the French Third and Tenth Armies, on the right again, which had originally faced north-east on the Soissons-Montdidier front, had gradually swung forward and joined in. The consequent flattening and shortening of the front from two sides of a great re-entrant, formed roughly by Soissons—Amiens—Arras, to its base Soissons—Arras had allowed the French Third Army to be withdrawn into reserve. On the 26th September the new line of the Allied Armies ran slightly west of north from near Soissons and passed west of St. Quentin and Cambrai to Lens (exclusive). Farther north, in the same period (August–September), the enemy had slowly retired before the British Fifth and Second Armies, giving up the salient gained in the Lys offensive of April, 1918, and then halting on its base, La Bassée—a point east of Ypres. A limited American offensive, too, had on the 12th–13th September obliterated the St. Mihiel Salient. No change had taken place on the other fronts: from St. Mihiel eastwards operations had not been ordered and the enemy had been quiescent; and the same had been the case on the Belgian front.

Maréchal Foch had for some time looked forward to enlarging the scope of the operations and "employing

[1] See End-paper A.

[2] The Hindenburg Position in this sector consisted of three trench positions known as the "Hindenburg Line", the "Hindenburg Support" and "Hindenburg Reserve" (or Beaurevoir) Line.

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" all the Allied forces in convergent action ", as suggested by Sir Douglas Haig.[1] In his Note of the 30th August, addressed to General Pershing,[2] he had sketched the general idea of the operation[3]:

" (1) The British Armies, supported by the left of " the French Armies, will continue to attack in the " general direction of Cambrai–St. Quentin.

" (2) The centre of the French Armies will continue " energetic action to throw the enemy beyond the " Aisne.

" (3) The American Army and the right of the French " Armies operating astride the Meuse and westward " will attack in the general direction of Mezières."

(Through this town[4] passed one of the two main railway arteries (Hirson–Thionville) of the German Armies actively operating on the Western Front, the other vital line being Liége–Aix la Chapelle, with its branches forward to Aulnoye and Ghent.)

On the 3rd September the Maréchal issued a Directive[5] which merely repeated items (1) and (2), but entered into some detail as regards (3), the Franco-American attack, which he said must be launched between the 20th and 25th September.

The withdrawal of the enemy from the Lys salient, the exhaustion and weakness of his troops in Flanders, and his lack of reserves seemed to indicate that useful results might be readily obtained in that quarter: at least an excellent jumping-off place for future operations might be secured there. On the 2nd September, therefore, the Generalissimo called for a plan from the British and the Belgian G.H.Q. On the 9th, at a conference, he enlarged the scope of his projected offensive, so that, as part of " the general battles of the " Allied Armies ", an advance would be made in the north, the ground between the Lys and the coast and the Flanders coast itself cleared, and a line through Ghent to the Dutch frontier reached. He fixed " between the 20th and 25th " September " as the date for launching this operation also. Further,[6] he formed a special Group of Armies (Groupe

[1] See " 1918 " Vol. IV, 316.
[2] Printed, in translation, as Appendix XXI in " 1918 " Vol IV.
[3] Sketch 1.
[4] See End-paper B.
[5] See " 1918 " Vol. IV. p. 443.
[6] See " 1918 " Vol. IV, p. 463.

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d'Armées des Flandres, known as "G.A.F."), under the King of the Belgians, with a French Staff, to carry it out. The British Second Army, with Sir Douglas Haig's consent, the Belgian Army and two French corps were assigned to this group.

On the 26th September[1] the Allied forces disposed between the Meuse and the North Sea were as follows:[2]

(1) The American First Army (General Pershing), comprising the III (General Bullard), V (General Cameron) and I (General Hunter Liggett) Corps, each of 4 divisions, with an Army reserve of 3 divisions and a French cavalry division, on a front from the Meuse below Verdun to the western edge of the Argonne (20 miles). The enemy's strength opposite was estimated at 19 divisions (7 in reserve).

(2) The French Fourth Army, under General Gouraud: 7 corps, comprising 25 divisions, with 2 divisions more and a cavalry corps (3 divisions) in Army reserve, from the western edge of the Argonne to 6 miles short of Reims (45 miles). It was faced by about 17 German divisions (5 in reserve).

(3) The French Fifth Army, under General Berthelot: 6 corps (1 Italian), comprising 11 French and 2 Italian divisions, with 2 French divisions in Army reserve, from east of Reims to 7½ miles east of Soissons (30 miles). It was faced by about 15 German divisions (4 in reserve).

The last two French Armies formed the Group of Armies of the Centre (G.A.C.) under General Maistre; from the 22nd September front (1) was under General Pershing who received orders direct from Maréchal Foch.[3]

(4) The French Tenth Army, under General Mangin: 4 corps, comprising 10 divisions, with 3 divisions in Army reserve, from east of Soissons northward nearly to the Oise (20 miles). It was faced by about 28 German divisions (18 in reserve).

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[1] See Sketch 1.

[2] East of the Meuse (See End-paper B), the inactive front, was held as far as the Moselle by the French XVII and II Colonial Corps and the American IV Corps, a total of 7 American and 6 French divisions, under the American First Army, and beyond the Moselle by the French Eighth (10 divisions) and Seventh (5 French and 3 American divisions) Armies, the two latter forming the Group of Armies of the East (G.A.E.), under General de Castelnau.

[3] Mordacq, ii, p. 278.

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(5) The French First Army, under General Debeney : 4 corps, comprising 8 divisions, with 6 in Army reserve, from the Oise to the right of the British (18 miles). It was faced by about 17 German divisions (7 in reserve).

The last two Armies formed the Group of Armies of Reserve (G.A.R.), under General Fayolle.[1]

(6) The British Fourth, Third, First and Fifth Armies, under Sir Douglas Haig, with 12 corps, comprising 52 divisions (including 2 American and all reserves) and 3 cavalry divisions, details of whose distribution will be given later, holding the front from St. Quentin to near Armentières (67½ miles)[2]. It was faced by about 63 German divisions (30 in reserve).

(7) The Group of Armies of Flanders, under the King of the Belgians : the British Second Army, with 4 corps, comprising 10 divisions, holding from Armentières to Ypres (inclusive) (14 miles), and the Belgian Army, with 12 divisions (forming 6 *divisions d'armée*), and the Belgian cavalry division, holding from Ypres to the sea (23 miles). Echeloned in reserve were the French troops : VII Corps (3 divisions), the XXXIV Corps (3 divisions) and the II Cavalry Corps (3 divisions). This group was faced by about 15 German divisions (5 in reserve)

In reserve, including Army reserves, were altogether 65 divisions (8 American, 4 Belgian, 24 British, 27 French and 2 Portuguese), with 10 cavalry divisions (1 Belgian, 3 British, 6 French).

It was estimated by the French Intelligence[3] that the enemy front was held from the Meuse, that is Verdun, to the sea by 103 divisions, with 26 between the Meuse and the Swiss frontier opposite the G.A.E., and 68 in reserve (20 fresh, 38 reorganized and 10 unfit), making a total of 197,

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[1] The French Third, Sixth and Ninth Armies had ceased to exist on 14th September, 7th September and 24th July, respectively.

[2] Of British divisions, besides the 4 Canadian, 5 Australian and 1 New Zealand, there were 50 on the Western Front (not including the 39th, reduced to training cadre). Of the 25 remaining of the 76 (Guards and 1st to 75th) divisions authorized, 4 were at home and had never been abroad ; 4 on home service had been disbanded early in the year ; the 70th was never formed ; 3 went to India ; 3 were in Italy ; 4 at Salonika ; 5 in Palestine ; and 1 in Mesopotamia.

[3] See End-paper B, and F.O.A., vii (ii), p. 11.

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of which two were Austrian (arrived in July); that is 12 German divisions had been broken up.[1]

Besides a slight superiority in divisions[2] and material the Allies enjoyed the advantage of high morale and complete confidence; the enemy had lost the initiative and was discouraged, his effectives were falling and through lack of reinforcements could not be replaced, but no falling off in his supply of material had been detected. Significant, perhaps, was the appeal which, in mid-September, the Committee of the International Red Cross Society, Geneva, addressed, at Germany's instigation, to all belligerent Powers, urging them to abandon the use of deleterious and asphyxiating gases.

No further instructions after the directive of the 3rd September were issued by Maréchal Foch; it was left to the four commanders-in-chief, under the advice and supervision given in personal visits by him, to make their preparations to push onwards straight to the front. By an Instruction dated the 6th September, General Pétain laid down the general lines of the Franco-American offensive in the direction of Mezières (50 miles to the north and near the boundary allotted to the American First and French Fourth Armies):

> the American First Army was "to gain possession "of the Hindenburg Position"[3] about two miles away on the right and 5½ miles on the left, and then push on twenty miles to the Buzancy Line, so as to outflank the enemy who might be opposing the French Fourth Army on the Vouziers—Rethel Line;

[1] The British Intelligence made the total 197, the same, including 4 Austrian, but estimated 113 (91 and 22), not 129 (103 and 26) in the front line, 84 in reserve (only 51 fit). The supposed distribution is given in Note II at end of Chapter.

German accounts speak of 10 divisions being reduced: to this must be added another, transferred from Russia but immediately distributed as reinforcements, and the amalgamation of the *2nd* and *4th Dismounted Cavalry Divisions* into one division (Kuhl).

[2] Counting American divisions as two, on account of their great establishment of infantry, 171 to 165 divisions on the active front from Verdun to the sea.

[3] Really the Brunhild Position (See Sketch 2 and End-paper B), with the Hunding Position, a continuation of the partly prepared Hermann Position (Guise-Le Cateau–Valenciennes–Tournai-Oudenarde), 12 miles and more behind the Hindenburg Position, which ran to Fismes on the Vesle between Reims and Soissons.

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the French Fourth Army was to carry successively the positions in front of it, the line Vouziers—Rethel being outflanked by the American Army, and then " develop " action " against the plateaux beyond the Aisne.

These two operations were to be simultaneous, about the 25th September, and great stress was laid on secrecy.

On the 16th General Pétain issued another Instruction, bringing the French Fifth Army into the picture and reducing the task of the Fourth, which was now not to go beyond the Aisne between Attigny and Rethel. To the former was assigned the capture of the Monts de Champagne (the hilly region between Reims and the Aisne), and it was then to guard the left of the Fourth Army. Thus the line Buzancy—Attigny—Rethel became the objective, and it was to be reached in three stages.

In the G.A.R.[1] the Tenth and First Armies were to continue their operations ;

the former, now facing a little north of east almost at right angles to the Armies on its right, was given Laon, 15 miles ahead as its direction. The First Army " has for its mission " to support the right wing of the British Fourth Army when " it attacks the Hindenburg Position, and then to cover the " right flank of the British in their march beyond the Canal " du Nord. When the British Fourth Army has crossed the " canal, the French First Army will debouch north of " St. Quentin, and take the general direction of Guise ", which lies 15 miles E.N.E. of St. Quentin.[2]

The British Armies, under Sir Douglas Haig, were to break through the Hindenburg Position on the St. Quentin—Cambrai front, and then advance in the general direction of Maubeuge (32 miles E.N.E. of Cambrai), that is eastwards.

The development of the plan of operations for the G.A.F. has been narrated in the previous volume :[3] it was first to gain a line from the Ypres—Comines Canal to Clercken (10

[1] See End-paper A.

[2] F.O.A. vii (i), p. 358.
The left of the British Third Army and the First Army were close up to but still had to cross the Canal du Nord. The right of the Third and the whole of the Fourth Army were already beyond it ; but they had the St. Quentin canal in front of them.
Note that north of Cambrai the St. Quentin becomes the Schelde Canal.

[3] See Sketches 1 and 7, and " 1918 " Vol. IV, pp. 453–5.

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miles north of Ypres) as a base, and then in two stages to reach a line from Ghent to the Dutch frontier, the British Second Army guarding the right flank.

The principal effort was therefore to be made on the extremities of the great front of attack: by the American First Army and French Fourth Army on the right, and by the British and Belgians on the left, and as they advanced the frontage of the central French Armies—and these had the largest reserves—would be greatly reduced. In fact, by the 11th November the front of the French Armies (Fourth, Fifth, Tenth and First), on the 27th September 110 miles, had been reduced to 55 miles, of which the Fourth Army held 18, its front at the last moment having been increased by 9 miles in order that the French, not the Americans, might enter Sedan.[1]

The re-arrangement of the troops on the fronts assigned to them, the Americans having to take ground to the left and the French Armies on their left having to be reinforced, and the mounting of the attack took slightly longer than expected. After several conversations with Sir Douglas Haig, whose troops had the heaviest task to perform, that of forcing the well organized Hindenburg Position—although the Americans had a hard nut to crack in the tangled and tumbled wilderness of the Argonne—Maréchal Foch decided on the following sequence of the various offensives:

26th September: Attack by Franco-American forces between the Meuse and Reims (American First and French Fourth Armies);
27th September: Attack by the British Third and First Armies;
28th September: Attack by the G.A.F.;
29th September: Attack by the British Fourth and French First Armies.

The bombardment by the two last Armies was to begin, however, on the 27th. By delaying the assault of the Fourth Army until two days after that of the Third and First Armies Sir Douglas Haig hoped to deceive the enemy as to the main point of attack, to allow of a prolonged bombardment of the strongest part of the enemy's position, thus facilitating the task of the Fourth Army, and so, in the end, to enable the Third and First Armies to get nearer to their final objective.[2]

[1] See End-paper A
[2] Despatch of 21st December, 1918.

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The French Fifth and Tenth Armies were not mentioned, but they were to join in as the French Fourth Army went forward. The Fifth, it may be said, " entered into action " on the 30th ",[1] and the Tenth, " acting in liaison with the " Fifth, kept on the heels of the enemy's rear guards on " the days of the 28th, 29th and 30th September ".[2]

On the 27th, Maréchal Foch addressed the following Note to Field-Marshal Haig, to General Pétain (Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North and North-East), and to General Pershing and General Degoutte (French Chief of Staff of the G.A.F.) :

" At the moment at which we have arrived the factor " of surprise and the wide-flung nature of the attacks " which we are launching against the enemy will compel " him to take very hurried counter-measures to reinforce " his troops holding the line ; the situation thus brought " about will prevent him both from bringing up his " forces methodically for concentrated action and from " assembling sufficient artillery and infantry on a " defensive position of any extent organized in advance. " In fact, it will prevent him from mounting any battle " of importance, even a defensive one. Thus, if we " do not give the enemy time to recover, we shall " encounter nothing but disorganized and intermixed " units ; at the very most, only improvised measures " can be taken to stop us.

" Doubtless, the enemy can use immense numbers of " machine guns to form a framework of defence and " cover his retreat. They are insufficient to build an " enduring defence, and the action of small bodies of " troops in particular, is the answer to this form of " tactics.

" Under these conditions, the attack should seek, " without ceasing, to break through ; it must organize " for the purpose assault groups (infantry, artillery), " whose task should be to reach objectives the possession " of which will ensure the disintegration of the enemy's " front.

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[1] F.O.A., vii (ii), p. 13.

[2] F.O.A., vii (ii), p. 15.

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" It is, therefore necessary :

" in corps, to determine and point out the distant and " decisive objectives ;

" in divisions, to select intermediate objectives ;

" in units (regiments and battalions), to take action " with rapidity and determination against the locali- " ties, particularly machine-gun nests, which tem- " porarily hold them up.

" The battle now depends on the determination of " corps commanders and on the initiative and energy of " divisional commanders.

" Once more, I repeat, the last say in battle comes " not from the endurance of the troops alone, who never " fail if appeal is made to them, but also from the " impulse of the commanders ".

NOTE I

THE ATTACK OF THE AMERICAN FIRST ARMY AND FRENCH FOURTH ARMY ON 26th SEPTEMBER[1]

(Sketch 2)

This attack was made between the Meuse and the Suippe, on a 44-mile front evenly divided between the Americans and the French. The dividing line ran up the western edge of the Argonne forest ; the capture of its very intricate defences, sited in naturally difficult country and developed during four years, thus fell to the Americans. The American First Army, under the personal command of General Pershing, employed the III, V and I Corps, each of 3 divisions in front line and one in reserve, with 3 more and a French cavalry division in Army reserve : total 15 divisions and a cavalry division. The French Fourth Army, under General Gouraud, employed six corps, XXXVIII, IX, II, XXI, XI and XIV, the flank corps containing 3 divisions and the others 4 each, a total of 22 with a cavalry corps in Army reserve. The XXXVIII Corps, next the Americans, had a long frontage of 9 miles for its 3 divisions, very nearly as much as was covered by the 4 centre French corps.

[1] From Pershing, Gallwitz and F.O.A. vii (i and ii). The official battle names, 26th September–3rd October, are : for the Americans " Montfaucon " ; and for the French, " Somme Py ".

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Opposite the attacking Armies lay the inner flanks of the Groups of Armies commanded by General von Gallwitz and the German Crown Prince, the dividing line passing through Varennes, to the east of the American–French boundary.

The attack was not altogether a surprise to the enemy : French deserters had given warning of an impending offensive. An offensive had been expected on the 25th against the Argonne ; and General von Gallwitz seems to have expected one in the Verdun area between the Moselle and the Meuse. It was not until 2 a.m. on the 26th that the presence of the Americans west of the Meuse was suspected, when a prisoner from the 4th Division near the Meuse was captured (Gallwitz, p. 390).

The bombardment opened at 11 p.m. on the 25th. " At the " beginning of the battle most of the light and heavy guns " [of the American Army] including corps and Army artillery " material and supply trains, as at St. Mihiel, were provided by " the French, some by the British, and practically none from " home. We had 189 light tanks, all of French manufacture, " 25 per cent. of which were handled by French personnel, but " no heavy tanks could be obtained ". (Pershing, p. 608). The French had 297 light tanks and 29 heavy, and the Allies had great superiority in the air.

The French began the infantry attack at 5.25 a.m., the Americans 5 minutes later.

" Les attaques franco-américaines d'une façon générale ne " rencontrent que de faibles résistances ". (F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 12).

The general advance was from two to three miles, but less near the junction of the two Armies. It was sufficiently deep for the greater part of the German heavy artillery to be captured. (Gallwitz, p. 391).

The first phase of the attack continued until the 3rd October with the results shown on Sketch 2.

NOTE II

DISTRIBUTION OF GERMAN DIVISIONS ON 26TH SEPTEMBER

	Divisions		
	Front Line	*Reserve Total*	*Reserve Fit*
Duke Albrecht of Württemberg's Group of Armies :—			
Army Detachment B (Swiss frontier to west of Colmar)	6	3	2
Army Detachment A (to west of Strasburg)	4	–	1
Nineteenth Army (to west of Metz) ..	5	5*	1

* Including one Austro-Hungarian division.

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26TH SEPTEMBER

	Divisions		
	Front Line	*Reserve Total*	*Reserve Fit*
Gallwitz' s Group of Armies :—			
Army Detachment C (to just east of Verdun on the Meuse)	7*	4	1
Fifth Army (to a third of the way to Reims)	5*	3*	5
German Crown Prince's Group of Armies :—			
Third Army (to two-thirds of the way to Reims)	7	2	6
First Army (to beyond Reims)	8	4	10
Seventh Army (to Vailly on the Aisne, whence the line ran north)	8	3	3
Ninth Army (to beyond La Fère) ..	10	18	2
Boehn's Group of Armies :—			
Eighteenth Army (to beyond St. Quentin, corresponding to British-French boundary)	10	7	1
Second Army[1] (to Havrincourt Wood, near the boundary of the British IV and VI Corps of the Third Army) ..	13	11	2
Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group of Armies :—			
Seventeenth Army (to south of Lens) ..	12	16	3
Sixth Army (to north of Armentières) ..	8	3	7
Fourth Army (to the sea)	10	5	7
	113	84	51
	84		
Total	197		

Thus on the active front from the Meuse to the sea, were :—

Opposite the French-Americans : 48 in front line, 37 in reserve.

Opposite the British-Belgians, 43 in front line, 35 in reserve.

No general reserves were retained : " The Army Group had to " find its own reinforcements ". (Ludendorff, p. 708)."

[1] On 22nd September General v. Carlowitz succeeded General v.d. Marwitz in command of the *Second Army*. The latter was transferred to the *Fifth Army*, on a quiet front, on account of " the failure of three feeble " divisions on his left wing on 18th September ". He and his Group commander, General v. Gallwitz, " discussed the scapegoat system and " doubted if leading was improved by punishment-transfer of high " commanders ". Gallwitz, p. 382.

* Including one Austro-Hungarian division.

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NOTE III

German Defensive Tactics

The German defensive tactics of the period afford the clue to the nature of the operations and of the successes gained by the Allies. In their almost daily attacks a limited amount of ground was won with comparative ease.

Some changes of nomenclature had taken place in 1917 on the German side, which are in themselves significant. The *Vorpostenfeld* (Outpost Zone) had become the *Kampffeld* (Forward Battle Zone), then came the *Hauptkampffeld* (Main Battle Zone), the *Grosskampffeld* (Greater Battle Zone), and the *Rückwärtige Stellung* (Rearward Position), and the *Rückwärtiges Kampffeld* (Rearward Battle Zone).

It was in 1918 the duty of the forward troops to fight in order to compel the enemy to use up his supports and to disorganize his waves of attack. Both elastic yielding and clinging regardless of cost to every scrap of ground had gone out of fashion. Battle reserves were closer up, within 10,000 to 12,000 yards, and had received the name, not of counter-attack divisions, but of *Eingreif* (co-operating, or locking into gear) divisions. These as they arrived to take part came under the command, regardless of seniority, of the divisional commanders already engaged in the area into which they were thrust. It was expected that the defensive battle proper would be fought by the *Eingreif* divisions in the " Greater Battle Zone ".

Lieut.-General Kabisch, commanding a division in 1918, has very clearly explained that the difference between the Forward and Greater Battle Zones " lay in the strength of the garrison " and the method of defence ". In the former as few troops as possible were used, posts only were occupied, and the defence was carried out by flanking fire from machine guns and single field guns. In the Greater Battle Zone the front line was the basis of the defence. It covered the field artillery supporting the Forward Battle Zone. Behind it were trenches for local counter-attack troops and local reserves, with plenty of dug-outs and communication trenches and defended localities, which could, in any case, be held long enough for the *Eingreif* divisions to come up, carry forward the original garrison and strike the enemy.

This nature of defence had been more or less successful in the mud of the Ypres Salient. But it failed on the hard chalk of the Santerre and of the great downs west of Cambrai, first because the scattered posts of the Forward Battle or Outpost Zone were easily overrun under barrages in the dark or the dim light of early morning, and secondly because if the British, undeterred by artillery fire, continued on, the *Eingreif* divisions were too few

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in number to stop them, and as a rule merely executed local counter-attacks, or were absorbed into the fighting line. The German infantry of the autumn of 1918 was not equal in quantity per division, or quality to that of 1916 or 1917, but the machine-gun fire-power of a division had increased and the organization of battle command improved; yet the system was expensive in divisions and actually required in theory a number which the British considered sufficient for an offensive. It will be seen in the narrative that the attackers rarely outnumbered the defenders, never by a substantial margin. The planned offensive, with the advantages of the initiative and of surprise, was, as will generally be the case, invariably superior to the planned defence.

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CHAPTER II

THE BATTLES OF THE HINDENBURG LINE[1]

BATTLE OF THE CANAL DU NORD

27TH SEPTEMBER

THE FIRST ARMY[2]

(Sketches 3, 4, 5)

On the 22nd September, after the successful preliminary operations known as the Battles of Havrincourt and Epéhy, G.H.Q. issued the following orders :[3]

" The successful operations of the First, Third and " Fourth Armies have brought us within striking dis- " tance of the enemy's main defences on the front " St. Quentin–Cambrai. The scope, direction and " sequence of the further operations of these Armies " will be as stated below :

" (*a*) The First Army [on the left] will attack on " Z Day [later fixed as 27th September] with a " view to capturing the heights of Bourlon Wood " in the first instance. It will then push forward " and secure its left flank on the Sensée river and " operate so as to protect the left of the Third Army.

---

[1] According to the official Battle Nomenclature, " The Battles of the Hindenburg Line " (12th September–12th October) included the Battle of Havrincourt, 12th September, and Battle of Epéhy, 18th September, both described in the previous volume; Battle of the Canal du Nord, 27th September–1st October; Battle of the St. Quentin Canal, 29th September–2nd October; Battle of the Beaurevoir Line, 3rd–5th October; and Battle of Cambrai 1918, 8th–12th October.

To save space, the major heading will not be repeated.

To G.H.Q. at the time the operations were known as " Battle of Cambrai - St. Quentin ", and divided into 1st and 2nd Phases, 27th–30th September, and 3rd Phase, 8th–10th October.

[2] G.O.C., Gen. Sir Henry Horne; M.G.G.S., Major-Gen. W. H Anderson; D.A. & Q.M.G., Major-Gen. A. W. Peck; M.G.R.A., Major-Gen. E. W. Alexander; C.E., Major-Gen. E. H. de V. Atkinson.

The First Army now consisted of the VIII, XXII and Canadian Corps, the I Corps having been transferred to the Fifth Army on 19th September.

For the divisions in the Armies, see Appendix I.

[3] See Sketch 3.

At this time Sir Douglas Haig's Advanced Headquarters were in a train west of Arras. The headquarters of the Armies were : First, Ranchicourt (13 miles north-west of Arras) ; Second, Cassel ; Third, Villers l'Hôpital (24 miles west of Arras) ; Fourth, Flixecourt (11 miles north-west of Amien; and, Fifth, Upen d'Aval (20 miles N.N.W. of Béthune).

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" (*b*) The Third Army will operate in the direction " of the general line Le Cateau–Solesmes. It will " attack on Z Day in co-operation with the First " Army, and will press forward to secure the passage " of the Canal de l'Escaut [Schelde canal] so as to be " in position to co-operate closely with the Fourth " Army on Z + 2 Day [29th September].

" The Third Army will assist the Fourth with " counter-battery work in the region la Terrière- " Villers Outreaux.

" (*c*) The Fourth Army, protected on the right by " the French First Army, will deliver the main attack " against the enemy's defences from le Tronquoy to " le Catelet, both inclusive, operating in the direction " of the general line Bohain–Busigny. The bombard- " ment will commence on Z Day, and the assault " will be delivered on Z + 2 Day ".

The instructions of the General Staff to the Q.M.G. and the Engineer-in-Chief which laid down, without giving the plans of the Commander-in-Chief, the policy for railway reconstruction and repair of road bridges on an advancing front were issued on the 9th September. These instructions and an account of the work done and the difficulties encountered, will be found in " Transportation on the Western " Front "[1]. It is, therefore, unnecessary to say more here than that six main feeder lines were selected to form the skeleton of future developments.

The heavy and siege guns, howitzers and anti-aircraft guns allotted to the Armies comprised[2]:

	Guns and Howitzers	*A.A. Guns*
First Army	594	48
Third Army	425	40
Fourth Army	557	44

Tank battalions were distributed: to the First Army, the 7th (I. Brigade); to the Third, the 11th (I. Brigade), 12th and 15th (II. Brigade); and to the Fourth, the 10th

[1] Pp. 436–461. A sketch map giving the railway routes, with the dates of the railheads, is reproduced later on as Sketch 20.

[2] Details of the artillery are given in Appendix II, in which also are included the " Army Troops " of the First Army, in order to give some idea of the apparatus involved. The Orders of Battle of a corps and of a division are given in Appendices III and IV.

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(II. Brigade), the 3rd, 6th and 9th, with the 17th Armoured Car Battalion (III Brigade), the 1st, 4th and 5th (IV. Brigade), and the 2nd, 8th, 13th and 16th (V. Brigade). This left the 14th Battalion (I Brigade) in reserve.[1] Although the tank commanders desired to employ their " creatures " in mass, the following instructions were issued by corps :

" Tanks may be employed in two different ways :

" (*a*) to destroy the wire to enable infantry to advance;

" (*b*) to accompany troops who are engaged in mopping " up with a view to capturing any pockets of the " enemy which are still holding out behind the leading " waves.

" In case (*a*) tanks will be employed in pairs, their " advance covered by a smoke screen, and they must be " closely followed by bodies of infantry.

" In case (*b*) tanks may be employed singly, and " should follow covered lines of approach with their " attendant infantry ".

The air force immediately available to support the three Armies[2] which were to be engaged consisted of 1,058 aircraft (236 with the First Army, 261 with the Third, and 337 with the Fourth), organized in 27 fighter squadrons, 4 fighter-reconnaissance squadrons, 7 day-bombers, 6 night-bomber and 13 corps squadrons, plus 3 flights. Patrols were to report on the progress of the attack at stated intervals (the infantry showing flares), to watch for counter-attacks, report active enemy batteries and other targets to the artillery, to keep down enemy balloons, to make low-flying attacks at

[1] The commanders of the Tank Brigades were : I, Br.-General C. D'A. B. S. Baker-Carr; II, Lieut.-Colonel G. A. McL. Sceales (acting until 18th October, when Br.-General H. K. Woods assumed command) ; III, Br.-General J. Hardress-Lloyd ; IV, Br.-General E. B. Hankey ; V, Br.-General A. Courage. A battalion had an establishment of 12 fighting tanks.

[2] The Royal Air Force (Major-General J. M. Salmond) on the British front was organized in brigades : with the First Army, the I Brigade (Br.-General D. Le G. Pitcher) ; with the Second, the II. Brigade (Br.-General T. I. Webb-Bowen) ; with the Third, the III Brigade (Br.-General C. A. H. Longcroft) ; with the Fourth, the V. Brigade (Br.-General L. E. O.Charlton) ; with the Fifth, the X. Brigade (Br.-General E. R. Ludlow-Hewitt). The IX. Brigade (Br.-General R. E. T. Hogg) was in reserve. With the G.A.F. in the north was also the Fifth Group (Dunkirk). The Independent Air Force (in the Nancy area) was to support the American-French offensive ; see Note II at end of Chapter XXXV.

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the crossings, and to machine-gun retiring enemy troops and guns, whilst fighters carried out offensive patrols and prevented interference.[1]

During the night of the 26th/27th the night bombers of the Headquarters IX Brigade were ordered to attack the railway stations at Denain (3 miles west of Valenciennes), Busigny and Le Cateau, on the three lines which fed the German front to be attacked, and certain areas were to be reconnoitred to discover the presence of reserves. During the morning of the 27th airfields were to be attacked and in the afternoon the railway stations again bombed.

Although the formal orders of G.H.Q. had not been issued until the 22nd September, the Army commanders had been informed previously of the plan of operations, so that General Horne was able to issue his instructions on the 18th.

The Canadian Corps was to force the passage of the Canal du Nord on a narrow frontage of about 2,500 yards where the canal was dry or had very little water in it,[2] and then spread out to 9,700 yards and secure a line between the Schelde and the Sensée canals. The important paragraphs of the instructions, which make what was required perfectly clear, ran as follows :[3]

> " The operations of the First Army will be carried out " by the Canadian Corps [on the right], with the co- " operation of the XXII and VIII Corps.
>
> " Canadian Corps will force the crossings of the " Canal du Nord between E.14 central [the boundary " with the Third Army] north of Moeuvres and Lock 3 " [about 2,500 yards north of the boundary] ; attack " and capture the Marquion Line [on the west side of " Bourlon Wood], Bourlon village and wood ; and " secure the general line [beyond the wood] Fontaine " Notre Dame (exclusive)—la Maison Neuve— " Sauchicourt Farm—railway crossing over the Canal " du Nord [1¾ miles west of the farm].

[1] For details see " War in the Air " vi, p. 512 *et seq.* These duties were carried out throughout the fighting when weather permitted.

[2] This sector was defended by two German divisions, the *7th Cavalry* (part) and *187th*.

[3] See Sketch 4.

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"From this line success will be exploited without "delay with the object of securing the high ground "about Sailly, Haynecourt, Epinoy, Oisy le Verger [a "north-south ridge crossing the west-east ridge Mar- "quion–Haynecourt–Ramillies].

"The eventual object of the Canadian Corps will be "to secure the general line Morenchies [on the Schelde, "a mile north of Cambrai]—Blécourt—factory east of "Epinoy —road thence to Aubencheul au Bac [on the "Sensée canal].

"The 11th Division, from Army reserve, will be "placed at the disposal of Canadian Corps for the "purpose of securing its left flank. On completion of "the operation, 11th Division will pass to the XXII "Corps, time of transfer being decided by G.O.C. "Canadian Corps.

"XXII Corps will assist the operations of Canadian "Corps:

"(i) by engaging hostile artillery;

"(ii) by gas and smoke bombardment on Oisy le "Verger, Palluel and crossings of the Sensée canal "between Palluel and Aubencheul au Bac;

"(iii) by engaging the enemy holding the cross- "ings over the Canal du Nord between the southern "corps boundary and Palluel, with the object of "deceiving the enemy as to the front of attack, and "by pushing across the canal so as to assist the "operation of the 11th Division as soon as the "withdrawal of the enemy renders such action "possible with the troops available.

"VIII and XXII Corps will carry out such "minor operations on Z Day, north of the Scarpe "as can be completed with the troops now in the "line with out entailing relief".

As a diversion before the attack, at midnight 26th/27th September, the 8th Division of the VIII Corps attacked the village of Arleux en Gohelle[1] and advanced the line about twelve hundred yards.

The I Brigade R.A.F., which had 12 squadrons plus two flights, 236 aircraft, was instructed to co-operate with the

[1] Not on Sketch 4. The village is about 7 miles north-west of Sailly en Ostrevent. It is marked Arleux on Sketch 5.

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Canadian Corps (which, like the other corps, also had its own corps squadron), and in particular prevent the enemy from crossing the Sensée canal and assist the passage over the Canal du Nord of the XXII Corps.

The Canadian Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. W. Currie)[1] had no easy task. In addition to crossing the physical obstacles of the Canal du Nord and some wet ditches on its western side,[2] the Canadians had to take three strong and well-wired trench systems, the Canal du Nord Line, about 300 yards east of the canal, the Marquion Line and the Marcoing Line; but the canal once passed, the enemy line north of the crossing place could be taken in flank by an advance northward.[3]

Lieut.-General Currie decided to carry out the attack in two phases.[4] In the first phase, using two divisions (the 4th and the 1st, the former with a front of attack of 1,700 yards, and the latter 800 against the dry sector of the canal), he proposed to capture a line beyond Bourlon Wood, with the left flank thrown back.[5] The 3rd and the 11th (British) Divisions, in second line, were then to come up on the right and left respectively, and in the second phase all four divisions advance to the high ground Sailly–Haynecourt–Epinoy,

[1] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. N. W. Webber; D. A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. G. J. Farmar; C.R.A., Major-Gen. E. W. B. Morrison; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. R. H. Massie; C.E. Major-Gen. W. B. Lindsay.

Br.-General Massie went on leave on 21st October, 1918, and from that date till cessation of hostilities Lieut.-Colonel A. G. L. McNaughton was acting C.H.A. of the Corps.

[2] For a description of the canal see "1918" Vol. IV, p. 424. At the place of passage the canal had a bank on the western side 10 to 12 feet high, and on the eastern, 4 to 5 feet, both revetted with brick to a height of 4 feet.

[3] From British Intelligence reports, contacts and German regimental histories, the minimum number of enemy divisions opposed to the right wing of the First Army was from north to south:

opposite XXII. Corps north of the Sensée:

214th and *39th* (at Palluel).

south of the Sensée:

in line, *58th*, *22nd*, *35th*, *207th*, *12th* (Epinoy), *187th*, *1st Guard Res.* (Bourlon), *7th Cavalry* (part)

in reserve, *234th* (about to be broken up), *26th Reserve* (reinforced on 29th), *3rd* (tired), *220th* (reinforced on 29th).

That is, the enemy had more divisions than the attackers, south of the Sensée 7½ in line plus 2 fresh ones as against 6; north of the Sensée 2 to 1.

[4] The Canadian Corps instructions are given verbatim in Appendix V.

[5] See Third Objective on Sketch 4.

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mentioned in First Army orders, also seize the bridges over the Schelde canal north-east of Cambrai and establish bridgeheads. Brutinel's Brigade[1] was given the special task of crossing the Schelde canal in the vicinity of Cambrai and exploiting success along the Cambrai–Iwuy–Valenciennes road. The 2nd Canadian Division was to be in reserve. The XVII Corps of the Third Army was to attack in conjunction with the Canadian Corps. Zero hour was 5.20 a.m.

The artillery under the Canadian Corps consisted of 22 brigades of field artillery (including 2 of the 11th Division) and 9 brigades of heavy artillery. Of these, 10 brigades of field and 2 brigades of heavy were allotted to the 4th and 1st Canadian Divisions, the attacking divisions in the first phase.

No preliminary bombardment was to be fired, but wire-cutting by the heavy artillery had been begun on the 18th. The first phase was to be carried out under creeping barrages,[2] with machine-gun barrages added, with three successive objectives[3]; there was to be a halt of 50 to 105 minutes on the first and 34 to 50 minutes on the second, the variation being due to the designed irregular trace of the objectives. Bourlon Wood was to be enveloped by the 4th Canadian Division on the north and south, leaving the centre to be mopped up later.

The 7th Tank Battalion (Mark IV. tanks) was at the disposal of the Canadian Corps, and it allotted one company (8 tanks) to each of the 1st, 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions. Tanks were not to be used beyond the third objective unless the advance was covered by a barrage.

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[1] This mobile brigade, which had done such good service on 8th August, was composed of a company of the Canadian Light Horse, Canadian Corps Cyclist Battalion, and the 1st and 2nd Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigades, under Br.-General E. Brutinel.

[2] Fifty per cent. shrapnel, 40 per cent. H.E., and 10 per cent. smoke. On the 27th the smoke blew towards the enemy, so he can have seen very little in the early morning:

To save repetition, it may be stated here that the creeping barrages of this period were usually formed in three belts by 18-pdrs., 4·5-inch howitzers and heavy howitzers in that order to the front. In every case part of the machine guns added to the barrage, whilst the rest were allotted to brigades, which also had their own Stokes mortar companies. Heavy trench mortar batteries, R.A. were added as required. A clear idea of the principles of artillery in attack at this period will be found in the orders of the Second Army for 28th September (see Chapter V).

[3] Shown in Sketch 4.

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As soon as the third objective had been taken, the 3rd Canadian Division was to move forward as rapidly as possible, and take over from the 4th the part of its front from the southern boundary of the corps to a road running eastward from Bourlon Station; and the 11th Division was to pass through the 1st Canadian Division.

The whole of the engineer units of the corps were put at the disposal of the Chief Engineer for work on bridges, roads, light railways and water supply, unless any were required by divisions for special tasks[1].

In the 4th Canadian Division (Major-General Sir D. Watson), the 10th Canadian Brigade (Br.-General R. J. F. Hayter) was holding the whole of the divisional front, and it was ordered to take the first objective under a creeping barrage fired by 6 field artillery brigades, a gun to every 17 yards. Then the 11th (Br.-General V. W. Odlum) and the 12th (Br.-General J. H. MacBrien) were to pass through and capture the second and third objectives, under creeping barrages fired by 8 field artillery brigades (4 fresh and 4 used for the first barrage) to the second objective, and 6 (including 2 used in the first barrage) to the third. Bourlon Wood was not to be touched, but it was to be screened by a smoke barrage after the capture of the first objective. As on the 8th August, the standard infantry formation was in waves, the first wave consisting of skirmishers in two lines thirty yards apart, the second, third and fourth of small section columns; with the fourth moved the allotted machine guns, trench mortars and the brigade forward signal party.

The 4th Canadian Division took all these objectives. Rain had fallen on the night of the 26th/27th, and at 5.20 a.m. when the 10th Canadian Brigade advanced, though the rain had ceased, the day was cloudy and dark, and the ground was slippery. The barrage was excellent and the canal was crossed by the infantry, and by 8 tanks over the dry part, without difficulty and, after some opposition from machine guns, the canal line was taken; but in front of the Marquion

[1] In preparation for bridging in the Canadian Corps and elsewhere, after air photographs had been studied, a depot of bridges of various lengths, ready and complete, was established, with a fleet of lorries standing by to take them forward as soon as reconnaissance reports were received and circumstances permitted.

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Line heavy machine-gun fire was encountered, considerable casualties were suffered and one tank was blown up by a mine. Nevertheless by 7.30 a.m., exactly to time, this line was captured.

After a pause of 50 minutes, the 11th and 12th Brigades advanced through the 10th to spread out. The 11th took the second objective, the western edge of Bourlon Wood, without great difficulty; but, as the 52nd Division of the XVII Corps, on the right, was not up, considerable fire was received from that direction, and a defensive flank along the line of trenches south of Bourlon Wood had to be formed. After a counter-attack from Fontaine Notre Dame, in the XVII Corps area, on the right front, had been repulsed and a line of trenches on the north-western edge of Bourlon village occupied, the brigade succeeded, about 7.30 p.m. in reaching the railway which here formed the third objective, although it had been strongly defended by machine guns and trench mortars. By that time, too, the brigade had completed the clearing of Bourlon Wood.

The 12th Canadian Brigade, with 3 tanks, in spite of artillery fire, machine-gun fire from Bourlon Wood and some short shooting on the part of its own artillery, which caused a check on the left, secured its second objective, including Bourlon village. In the advance to the third objective, the left battalion, owing to this check, lost its original barrage, and only one company reached the railway. Another barrage was arranged, and by 5 p.m. the whole of the third objective had been occupied.

The 1st Canadian Division (Major-General A. C. Macdonell), although it had a frontage of about 2,900 yards, had to cross the canal on the 800 yards of dry sector on its right, gradually opening out to 6,000 yards on the third objective. Of its small frontage, it assigned 500 yards to the 1st Canadian Brigade (Br.-General W. A. Griesbach), which was to carry the assault right through to the third objective; the 3rd Canadian Brigade (Br.-General G. S. Tuxford), crossing the remaining 300 yards of frontage was to capture the first and second objectives. From the latter, the left wing only was to go on to the third objective, the 2nd Canadian Brigade (Lieut.-Colonel W. F. Gilson, acting) passing through the

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right wing to accompany it. The barrages were to be fired by 8 field artillery brigades, two others being used as mobile formations ; two guns were, however, brought up into the front line to keep down machine-gun fire at the beginning of the attack.

The attack of the 1st Canadian Brigade went exactly as planned. The canal was easily carried by the leading company in twelve minutes, and the rest of the battalion, with two tanks which managed to cross, following the barrage closely, took the first objective, where both tanks were knocked out by shell-fire. Another battalion then passed through and captured the second objective, except on the right, where it was held up by fire from the railway embankment, about the time that the 12th Canadian Brigade (4th Division) was checked. Further advance by the 1st Canadian Brigade was stopped by fire, and the barrage was lost ; but eventually, about noon, after the company of the 12th Canadian Brigade had got across the railway, the enemy gave way and the 1st Canadian Brigade was able to capture the third objective soon after 1 p.m.

In the 3rd Canadian Brigade, which had to pass the canal on a frontage of only 300 yards, the leading battalion, after crossing, was to wheel to the left and capture Sains lez Marquion and then the third objective, whilst the second battalion, following the first closely over the canal, was to take the second objective, with Marquion at its northern end. German machine guns furnished the chief opposition, and those firing from the upper storeys of the houses of Sains lez Marquion caused many casualties ; but the canal was crossed, and inside the village the resistance was half-hearted, and, with the help of four tanks, about three hundred and fifty prisoners and some machine guns were taken. The barrage arrangements entailed a halt of one hour and forty-five minutes on the first objective, during which considerable casualties were suffered. When the advance was resumed, the second objective was quickly reached by both battalions, except on the left, where fire from Marquion and thick belts of wire caused a check and the barrage was lost. No tanks appeared to crush the wire, the Stokes mortars were knocked out, wire cutting by hand was only productive of losses, and communication with the artillery failed ; so a pause ensued until fresh troops appeared.

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For the advance of the left (the 15th Battalion) of the 3rd Canadian Brigade, north of the dry sector of the canal, it was arranged that the engineers should by 9.30 a.m. construct three bridges; but, owing to enemy fire, they succeeded in making only one, just north of Sains lez Marquion. By this and by planks laid over the Agache, which is 8 to 10 feet wide with steep banks, towards 11 a.m. the battalion crossed. About the same time the leading battalion (11/Manchester) of the 11th Division which was to pass through the 1st Canadian Division at the third objective, had crossed the canal by three foot-bridges half a mile north of Sains lez Marquion, made by the 11th Division engineers.

When these fresh troops appeared on the left, the whole line of the 3rd Canadian Brigade rose and went forward in one long wave. The Germans broke and little further opposition was encountered in capturing Marquion and the second objective. The 15th Battalion and 11/Manchester, although they had lost the barrage, then continued on against weakening resistance, with the 7th Battalion (of the 2nd Canadian Brigade, which was to pass through the right of the 3rd at the second objective), on the right, and by 2.30 p.m. the third objective had been secured, so that the 1st Canadian Division had everywhere accomplished its task.

Even before the first objective had been reached, in spite of some machine-gun fire early in the day and sporadic shell fire all day, the bridging of the Canal du Nord, over which all the permanent bridges had been destroyed, and of the Agache stream, was taken in hand. In the wet section the average width of the canal was about 60 feet and depth 15 feet; in most places, however, the depth of the water was not too great for the use of trestles, but pontoons were also used. For the Agache, shore-ends for one span to carry the roadway were sufficient.

The 4th Brigade Canadian Engineers had three bridges passable for its division for one-way horse vehicles by 6.50 a.m., 7.50 a.m. and 8 a.m. respectively. Two-way traffic was possible an hour later, and two-way lorry traffic over the bridge on the Inchy–Bourlon road by 8.20 a.m. The 1st Brigade Canadian Engineers was more troubled by machine-gun fire—from the vicinity of Sains lez Marquion—and had to fight in order to reach the site of the bridge at the

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southern end of that village. By 10 a.m., however, four footbridges for the rear battalion of the 3rd Canadian Brigade and for the 11th Division were finished, and two horse-traffic bridges had been constructed by 1.30 and 3.30 p.m. respectively. Work on the most southerly bridge on the Buissy—Sains lez Marquion road was less troubled by fire, and this bridge was ready for one-way traffic by 9 a.m. and for two-way lorry traffic by 5.30 p.m.

The work of the 11th Division engineers was also hampered by machine-gun fire from the woods north of Sains lez Marquion; but, as already mentioned, three footbridges were made in time for the leading infantry of the division to pass. One of these was converted by midday into a pack transport bridge for machine guns; at Marquion a bridge for horsed traffic was completed by 2.5 p.m., and a pontoon bridge for lorries by 3.25 p.m.

Heavy bridges, to take all traffic except tanks, built by the 4th and 5th Army Troops Companies at Sains lez Marquion and Marquion were ready by the morning of the 28th.

It remained to carry out the second phase of the operation. This was done by the 1st Canadian, 11th and 56th Divisions only; for the 4th Canadian Division, owing to its slower advance, did not take the third objective (first phase) until the evening, and, its right flank being exposed by the XVII Corps not being up, it was not then in a position to undertake any further advance on the 27th. The part of the 4th Canadian Division, in the second phase, also that of the 3rd in rear of it, was therefore postponed until next day.

In Lieut.-General Currie's instructions it was impressed upon the 1st Canadian Division that it should take Haynecourt, which with Epinoy lies on a spur running down to the Sensée, as soon as possible after gaining the third objective. This was in order to obtain observation over the ravine which, beginning near the village, runs north-eastward through Bantigny to the Sensée, and was probably the enemy's main line of approach for counter-attack and of retreat for his artillery. From Haynecourt some troops were to be despatched towards Epinoy to assist the advance of the 11th Division, whilst the main attack proceeded north-eastward towards Abancourt station. The 11th Division was to advance against Epinoy—Oisy le Verger, its final

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objective being a position which would give observation over the crossings of the Sensée valley from the Canal du Nord to Aubigny au Bac. The advance began at 3 p.m., the 2nd Canadian Brigade passing through the line for the purpose, supported by the two brigades of the 1st Canadian artillery, which had crossed the canal, and two 6-inch howitzer batteries. The scheduled time, 2.20 p.m., had been postponed at the request of the 11th Division, as its advance had been delayed by enemy machine guns, overlooked in the first advance, which required mopping up.

Haynecourt was taken without much difficulty; but in the further advance of the 1st Canadian Division, as the 4th Canadian Division was only just approaching the third objective, an ever-lengthening right flank developed, so that machine-gun fire was received not only from the front but in enfilade. Nevertheless, after cutting through two belts of wire by hand, the two leading battalions of the 2nd Canadian Brigade reached the Cambrai–Douai road, 3 miles beyond the third objective. By that time the reserve, the other two battalions and one from the 1st Canadian Brigade, with 16 machine guns, had been absorbed in forming the defensive flank, and no further advance was possible.

The attack of the 11th (Northern) Division (Br.-General O. de l'E. Winter, the C.R.A. temporarily in command)[1] was launched at 3 p.m. from the front Leek Wood to beyond Sauchicourt Farm, about two thousand yards wide, almost as soon as this line was reached. The division had not only to open out fan-wise to cover over seven thousand yards, but reach the line Epinoy–Oisy le Verger, nearly at right angles to its original front. The movement was entrusted to the 32nd Brigade (Br.-General W. P. S. Foord), then in the line, and the 34th Brigade (Br.-General B. G. Clay). The 32nd Brigade had cleared the enemy from the canal banks under the barrage fired at 8.40 a.m. for the advance from the first objective, and had crossed the canal between noon and 1.15 p.m.; the 34th, after some opposition from machine guns, had begun to cross at 11 a.m., and, as has been seen, its leading battalion (11/Manchester) had assisted in capturing the second objective. The attack was supported by two 6-inch howitzer batteries (I Canadian Brigade) and

[1] Major-General H. R. Davies had been wounded on 13th September and did not resume command until 13th October.

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by the divisional artillery (Br.-General W. O. H. Dodds, Canadian Field Artillery, in temporary command), which had crossed the canal and was in action west of Marquion, and by four Army brigades R.F.A., which, after firing the barrages in the first phase, had also crossed and were north of Marquion. A creeping barrage for the attack on Oisy le Verger was fired in enfilade by three (two Army) brigades under the C.R.A. 56th Division (Br.-General R. J. G. Elkington), whilst two others (one Army) fired a flank barrage to protect the left of the 11th Division.

In spite of opposition, chiefly from machine guns in Epinoy and a factory east of it, by 6.15 p.m. the 32nd Brigade had captured the village and established the desired line beyond it. The leading battalion of the 34th Brigade (the 11/Manchester) directed on Oisy le Verger, after losing its commander and several other officers, swung off to the right, and, under the adjutant, attacked and took the railway cutting south-east of the village near Bois de Puits. At his suggestion, the supporting battalion, the 8/Northumberland Fusiliers, kept the correct course, and, covered by machine-gun fire from the railway, in spite of having to advance over flat open ground against considerable opposition, about 6.30 p.m. captured Oisy with two hundred prisoners, and before dark had established an outpost line on the spur.

On the left of the 11th Division, the 56th (1st London) Division (Major-General Sir A. Hull), of the XXII Corps[1] (Lieut.-General Sir A. J. Godley) by corps direction, in order that the 11th Division might not have to trouble about its left flank, attacked northwards on both banks of the Canal du Nord on a larger scale than the Army commander had intended and with deserved success. Eight companies of machine guns and eight brigades of field artillery were placed at its disposal, and the corps artillery took part in counter-battery work and in the bombardment of the passages of the Sensée canal between Palluel and Aubencheul au Bac.

The 169th Brigade (Br.-General E. S. de E. Coke), which was detailed to cross the canal and work up its eastern bank, was unable to start the attack until half-an-hour after the

[1] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. C. W. Gwynn; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. A. E. Delavoye; B.G.R.A., Br.-Gen. E. W. M. Powell; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. A. S. Jenour; C.E., Br.-Gen. A. E. Panet.

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appointed time, for two reasons. First, the divisional field companies R.E. (512th and 50th) with the pioneer battalion (1/5th Cheshire) had to drive the enemy from the eastern bank before they could begin work on two bridges (one north and one south of the Arras–Cambrai road), and the passages were not ready until 1 p.m., an hour and more late. Secondly when the leading battalions had crossed, the ground not being completely cleared of the enemy, they had to fight to reach their jumping-off places. Then, however, the attack went well. Sauchy Lestrée, Sauchy Caulchy and Cemetery Wood were taken without difficulty; beyond these localities machine guns commanded the swampy ground over which further advance had to be made, and though fighting went on throughout the night, it was not until 2 a.m. on the 28th, after the moon had given sufficient light, that a combined movement could be organized, and it was 3 a.m. before touch was obtained with the 11th Division near Oisy le Verger.

The 168th Brigade (Br.-General G. G. Loch) on the western side of the canal, encountered similar difficulties; but it halted at 6.20 p.m. and did not resume attack until the 169th advanced at 2 a.m., when Mill Copse was found abandoned by the enemy, and his post on the canal bridge, just beyond, was captured.

The 167th Brigade (Br.-General G. H. B. Freeth), as ordered, sent patrols towards Palluel. On its left, the 4th Division (Major-General L. J. Lipsett), and the 51st (Highland) Division (Major-General G. T. C. Carter-Campbell) at 5.35 a.m. made "Chinese attacks", that is they pulled up dummy-figures made of painted canvas on wooden frames, representing an advance in No-Man's-Land and for an hour fired a barrage. The enemy took very little notice, and as the light was bad may not have seen the dummies. During the night of the 27th/28th the 4th Division engineers constructed a bridge across the Trinquis, five hundred yards west of Sailly en Ostrevent[1] and three posts were established north of the river.

Farther to the left[2], in the VIII Corps sector (Lieut.-General Sir A. Hunter-Weston), one brigade of the 8th

[1] The Trinquis has there 10 feet width of water between steep banks 15 feet deep and requiring a bridge 30 to 36 feet long.

[2] See Sketch 5.

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Division (Major-General W. C. G. Heneker) took part in the " Chinese attack ".

Thus, except on the right wing, where the failure of the left of the Third Army to reach its objective had prevented the second phase of the attack being executed, the operations of the First Army on the 27th September, mainly carried out by the Canadian Corps, had resulted in complete success: the 1st Canadian and 11th Divisions had not only gone beyond the third objective, but beyond the line suggested for exploitation.

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CHAPTER III

BATTLE OF THE CANAL DU NORD (*continued*)

27TH SEPTEMBER (*concluded*)

THE THIRD ARMY[1]

(Sketch 6)

In compliance with G.H.Q. orders mentioned in the previous chapter,[2] orders of the Third Army were issued on the 20th September. Facing this Army was the right of the German *Second Army* and the left of the *Seventeenth Army*, their junction being near Havrincourt.[3] They were in position in the Hindenburg Line and the Hindenburg Support, and were strongly entrenched in depth as far back as the Schelde canal, and beyond it, particularly at Rumilly, which commanded the salient bend of the canal between Masnières and Marcoing. The ground over which the advance had to be made was a "maze of trenches", and there was no possibility of open fighting until the Schelde canal had been passed and the enemy cleared out of Rumilly. He was evidently in no mood to leave his position unless driven from it, and indeed manifested the utmost stubbornness, especially on the fronts of the XVII and VI Corps.

In the first instance, the attack was to be carried out (eastward) in echelon from the left with three objectives. On the left, these were continuations of the objectives of the first phase of the Canadian Corps; but their distance from the front line gradually decreased southwards, so that on the right the third objective ran into the front near Gouzeaucourt. Thus, on the 27th the attack involved the advance of the three corps on the left of the Army, the XVII, VI and IV only, leaving the V Corps on the right

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[1] G.O.C., Gen. Hon. Sir Julian Byng; M.G.G.S., Major-Gen. L. R. Vaughan; D. A. & Q.M.G., Major-Gen. A. F. Sillem; M.G.R.A., Major-Gen. A. E. Wardrop; C. E., Major-Gen. W. A. Liddell.

[2] See Sketch 6.

[3] From north to south in line were at least 9½ divisions, *7th Dismounted Cavalry* (part), *49th*, *20th*, *6th*, *113th*, *Jäger*, *6th Dismounted Cavalry* (on its relief), *201st*, *87th* and *21st Reserve*; with the *3rd Naval*, *49th Reserve*, *30th* and *18th Reserve* as *Eingreif* divisions, total 13½ as against 14 of the Third Army (including 4 of the V. Corps not engaged).

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out of the picture, and the advance stopped short of the Schelde canal. Satisfactory progress was achieved, but nowhere was the third or final objective reached.

The XVII Corps and the left division of the VI had to begin their advance by crossing the Canal du Nord ;[1] but the rest of the Third Army was already over it ; both the above mentioned corps had also to force the Hindenburg Support and the Marquion–Cantaing Lines.

The XVII Corps was to attack in conjunction with the Canadian Corps of the First Army on its left, and was to take advantage of every opportunity to exploit success and secure the crossings of the Schelde canal, and it was to retain in hand a special body of troops for this purpose. Zero hour, 5.20 a.m., was to be the same as that of the Canadian Corps.

The VI Corps was to capture the Flesquières ridge and its spur which runs northward to Graincourt and Anneux, and clear the Hindenburg Support which lay athwart the line of advance, partly on the reverse slope of the Flesquières ridge. Zero hour was to be the same as or later than that of the XVII Corps, and was made the same by Lieut.-General Haldane. A special body of troops was to be detailed to exploit success by securing a bridgehead east of the Schelde canal in the direction of Rumilly.

The IV Corps was to capture Beaucamp and Highland Ridge, the long spur running from west of Gouzeaucourt down to Ribecourt, clearing the Hindenburg Line, which here was nearly at right angles to the front, as far east as Couillet valley. If enemy resistance was weak and if the VI Corps was able to cross the Schelde canal, the IV Corps was to continue the advance to Welsh Ridge. Its Zero hour was ordered to be some hours later than that of the VI Corps, because the general line of the IV Corps south of Havrincourt was ahead of that of the VI Corps north of the village. Zero was eventually put about 3 hours later for the left of the corps, at which time the VI Corps would be leaving its first objective. This was an unfortunate arrangement against which the commander of the VI Corps protested ; for the right of the corps was in the Havrincourt–Ribecourt valley, and the left of the IV Corps on the heights south of it, which

[1] In the Third Army area this canal was only partially constructed, and was dry from the northern Army boundary at Moeuvres as far as the entrance to the tunnel west of Havrincourt Wood.

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...crowned" at least level with the ... of the night of that corps would be ... Army commander had in his mind a wheel ... the left leading, instead of aiming at a ... attack at dawn. A kind of com- ... which the greater part of the ... at daylight at Zero + 2 hours ... Highland Ridge had serious ...

... was to be prepared to conform ... any advance made by the corps on ... to form a flank ground towards the ... the 1st battalion moved ...

... Brigade, Br.-General ... ranks as follows: ... less one company for ... less one ... reserve, the 12th ...

... A. H. Longcroft) ... co-operated ... of the 26th/ ... bombers ... Army.[2] ... fighting ...

... General ... 155th ... be charged ... division ...

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... Br.-Gen. ... N. G. ...

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had been so reduced in numbers during its ten days' occupation of the Moeuvres sector that at the last it was given the smaller rôle of capturing the area, short of the first objective, between the corps' southern boundary and the Moeuvres–Graincourt road up to but exclusive of the Hindenburg Support Line. The 63rd Division, advancing through Moeuvres in a south-easterly direction was half an hour before Zero to take over the frontage it required on the left of the 52nd and deal with the first and second objectives on the whole corps front. These secured, the 57th Division keeping one brigade in hand for exploitation, was to pass through to capture the third objective.

The artillery available comprised the four field brigades of the 40th and 52nd Divisions and four Army brigades, under the C's.R.A. of the 52nd and 63rd Divisions (Br.-Generals A. P. Musgrave and E. H. de Rougemont), four brigades of 6-inch howitzers and one 6-inch gun battery. The 18-pdr. batteries of seven field brigades were to fire the initial creeping barrage, and the eighth was to place smoke screens on ground which afforded observation to the enemy; the 4.5-inch field howitzers were to form a standing barrage on points allotted by divisions, conforming later to the 18-pdr. barrage, but keeping not less than 200 yards ahead of it. Of the heavy artillery, two brigades were to support the divisions in their attack; the rest were to be used for counter-battery work. In the Third Army, as in the First, wirecutting had been begun on the 18th September.

Four tanks were placed at the disposal of the 52nd Division and six at that of the 63rd.

The manoeuvre required of the infantry of the 52nd (Lowland) Division (Major-General F. J. Marshall), was somewhat complicated and difficult to support with artillery fire, but the men accomplished all that was asked of them. At 5.20 a.m., zero hour, the 156th Brigade (Br.-General A. H. Leggett) with a machine-gun company, following guide tapes laid for the purpose, passed through the left front of the 155th Brigade, whose troops had been withdrawn from Moeuvres to the south and north half an hour earlier. It then moved first east and then S.S.E., making for the limited objective of the division 500 yards short of the Hindenburg Support Line. As soon as the 156th was clear of the front,

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obviously ought to be "crowned" at least level with the advance of the VI Corps, or the right of that corps would be enfiladed.[1] The Army commander had in his mind a wheel of his four corps, the left leading, instead of aiming at a simultaneous surprise attack at dawn. A kind of compromise was reached by which the greater part of the IV Corps went forward in daylight at Zero + 2 hours 32 minutes. Its failure to reach Highland Ridge had serious consequences, as will be seen.

The V Corps, on the right, was to be prepared to conform to and co-operate with any advance made by the corps on its left flank, with the object of gaining ground towards the Schelde canal. Actually, only the left battalion moved forward.

The commander of the I Tank Brigade (Br.-General C. D'A. B. S. Baker-Carr), was to allot tanks as follows: to the IV Corps, the 11th Battalion, less one company for the V Corps; to the VI Corps, the 15th Battalion, less one company for the XVII Corps; to Army reserve, the 12th Battalion.

The III Brigade R.A.F. (Br.-General C. A. H. Longcroft) with 15 squadrons plus one flight (261 aircraft) co-operated with the Third Army, and during the night of the 26th/27th, in spite of low clouds and rain, the night bombers attacked selected German headquarters opposite the Army.[2]

In view of the sequence in Third Army orders, the fighting will be described from left to right.

It had been intended by the XVII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. Fergusson)[3] that the 52nd Division, whose 155th Brigade was holding the corps front, should be charged with taking the first and second objectives; but this division

[1] As it had been in much the same circumstances on 11th and 12th April, 1917 in the Battles of Arras, when the valleys of the Scarpe and the Cojeul had been the boundaries of the VI Corps. See "1917", Vol. I, p. 261–2 and 280–2.

[2] For details of the air operations see "War in the Air," vi, pp. 51 *et seq.* One squadron was told off for low-flying attacks in flights to assist the attack, especially against any strongpoints. These receive no mention in the air reports or the infantry diaries.

[3] Br.-Gen. G.S., Br.-Gen. W. D. Wright; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. R. F. A. Hobbs; C.R.A., Br.-Gen. E. H. Willis; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. N. G. Barron; C.E., Br.-Gen. W. D. Waghorn.

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had been so reduced in numbers during its ten days' occupation of the Moeuvres sector that at the last it was given the smaller rôle of capturing the area, short of the first objective, between the corps' southern boundary and the Moeuvres–Graincourt road up to but exclusive of the Hindenburg Support Line. The 63rd Division, advancing through Moeuvres in a south-easterly direction was half an hour before Zero to take over the frontage it required on the left of the 52nd and deal with the first and second objectives on the whole corps front. These secured, the 57th Division keeping one brigade in hand for exploitation, was to pass through to capture the third objective.

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the 157th Brigade (Br.-General C. D. Hamilton-Moore) started southwards from Moeuvres, with the tanks, to mop up both banks of the canal and the Hindenburg Line west of the canal. The 156th Brigade in its eastern advance was delayed and slowed up not only by fire from the eastern bank, but also by uncut wire concealed by a slight rise on the western bank of the canal, and by gas shelling which necessitated the wearing of gas masks. Thus it lost the barrage. To continue the advance over the open was found impossible and resort was made to bombing along the trenches. By this means the canal was reached and then crossed about 9.30 a.m., and bombing along the trenches beyond was then continued. Good progress was accomplished, two hundred prisoners being taken, and touch gained about 12.30 p.m. with the Guards Division of the VI Corps. It was not, however, until 2.40 p.m., when the 63rd Division made its second attempt and went forward on the left, that the 156th Brigade could get on the move again and reach the divisional objective. Meanwhile the 157th Brigade, assisted by low-flying aircraft and by the three tanks which preceded its right wing (although in the end they were knocked out by shell fire), had, as early as 7.30 a.m., cleared the front trenches of the line and obtained touch with the Guards; by 11 a.m., aided by the advance of the 156th Brigade, it had also cleared both banks of the canal. The task of the 52nd Division had, therefore, been completely, though a little belatedly, accomplished.

The engineers and pioneers of the division had a bridge over the canal on the Moeuvres–Graincourt road passable for artillery about 11 a.m.; work on the bridge on the Bapaume–Cambrai road was delayed by machine-gun fire until midday, but horse traffic began to cross at 4.30 p.m. and tanks and lorries were able to do so by 7 p.m. A trestle bridge four hundred yards south of Moeuvres was ready by 6 p.m. It may be added that the engineers and pioneers of the 63rd Division made two trestle bridges over the dry bed of the canal north and south of the Moeuvres–Bourlon road, which were ready for wheeled traffic by 11.30 a.m. and 6.45 p.m. respectively.

The 63rd (Royal Naval) Division (Major-General C. A. Blacklock) had its 190th Brigade (Br.-General W. B. Lesslie) by 4 a.m. in position on its initial narrow frontage of under

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half a mile between the northern corps boundary, next to the Canadians, and the southern edge of Moeuvres behind the 52nd Division. The Moeuvres–Graincourt road was the southern boundary, so, as this road ran aslant, the division had gradually to increase its frontage to about two miles as it advanced. The 188th Brigade (Br.-General J. F. S. D. Coleridge) was in second line, and the 189th (Br.-General B. J. Curling) in reserve. The canal was crossed by two battalions of the 190th after some stiff fighting, the third battalion being used to mop up the canal banks, and all three reached the first objective and a position astride the Hindenburg Support. Here, about 8 a.m., they were held up in front, and progress down the Hindenburg Support by two battalions was delayed by machine-gun fire, particularly from a sugar factory beyond it. An attack by a platoon on this building, already well known in the Battle of Cambrai in the previous autumn, having failed, a message was sent back without result asking for an artillery " crash " on it, and further movement ceased until the advance of the 188th and 189th Brigades in the afternoon. Of four tanks, two caught fire whilst still on the western bank and the other two, after dealing with machine-gun posts in the Hindenburg Support, came to a halt through mechanical trouble.

The 188th Brigade, following the 190th, was across the canal and deployed by 7 a.m. Passing through the left wing of the 190th Brigade, after mopping up some machine-gun posts, it reached the first objective between the corps northern boundary and the Hindenburg Support in time to go forward with the barrage at 7.58 a.m. ; then it at once came under machine-gun and trench-mortar fire and was held up on the near side of the Bapaume–Cambrai road, though the Canadians on the left had reached their second objective, the western end of Bourlon Wood, continuing on to the third at 10.20 a.m. It took some time for information to filter back, but orders were eventually given by the division for the 189th Brigade, from reserve, to support the attack, after a bombardment of the sugar factory from 1.15 to 2.15 p.m. and for a general advance under a barrage when the bombardment lifted. The attack by the 188th and 189th Brigades, which, according to the records, was begun at 2.40 p.m., was immediately successful ; the sugar factory was taken with slight opposition ; but both Anneux and Graincourt, whose eastern outskirts were the second

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objective, gave trouble ;[1] so the 172nd Brigade of the 57th Division was brought up and under a special barrage took the latter village. Both villages were captured by 4 p.m., timely warning of a counter-attack being given from the air. The 190th Brigade had by this time completed the mopping up of the Hindenburg Support. Thus the 63rd Division had gained all its objectives.

The 172nd Brigade (Br.-General G. C. B. Paynter) and the 171st Brigade (Br.-General F. C. Longbourne) of the 57th (2nd West Lancashire) Division (Major-General R. W. R. Barnes) should have passed through as soon as possible and taken the third and final objective. They had advanced from Moeuvres at 7 a.m., and before 1 p.m. the divisional artillery had crossed the canal and was ready in support, indeed had taken part in the bombardment of Graincourt. The pre-arranged visual signal for the advance of the infantry —the firing of " success " signals—was, however, rendered ineffective by the Germans sending up a number of coloured lights. The confusion which ensued and the difficulties in sending back information to divisional headquarters and forwarding orders from them caused delay, and it was not until 6 p.m. that the leading battalions were ordered forward. They arrived at the front just in time to assist in repelling a strong counter-attack made against Anneux and Graincourt. As a result of this counter-attack the artillery continued to fire the protective barrage, then falling just in front of Anneux. This prevented any further forward movement of the 171st Brigade ; but in the evening the 172nd managed to advance about a thousand yards beyond Graincourt against considerable opposition. Thus the final objective was not secured, and at night the left of the XVII Corps was some three thousand yards behind the flank of the Canadian Corps. It was a matter of regret that a first-class and well-rested division could not have been provided to operate alongside the Canadian 4th Division.

The VI Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Haldane),[2] although also unable to reach its final objective, fought its way beyond

[1] The buildings of the two villages cover just under 3,000 yards, including a gap of 750 yards, in which there is a cemetery, between them.

[2] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. R. H. Kearsley; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. J. B. G. Tulloch; C.R.A., Br.-Gen. J. G. Rotton; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. A. Ellershaw; C.E., Br.-Gen. R. N. Harvey.

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the second objective on its whole front. Both the Hindenburg Line and the Canal du Nord passed through its front, the latter about the middle of it and the former on the extreme left, so that the troops on the left had to cross both Line and canal, although those on the right had not to negotiate either of them. The Hindenburg Support passed aslant the front, with Ribecourt before it and Flesquières close behind it. The ruins of the latter village stood on the highest ground in this sector, on an east-west ridge which overlooks the valley from Havrincourt to Marcoing, in which a railway ran. The first objective entailed an average advance of fifteen hundred yards, and included the northern part of the Hindenburg Support; the second had in it Flesquières and the central portion of the Support; and the third contained Ribecourt, the southern part of the Support, Marcoing (on the Schelde canal) and the Cantaing Line.

The Guards and 3rd Divisions were to take the first and second objectives, up to and a little beyond which the creeping barrage could range; should they meet with little resistance, they were to continue on to the third objective; but if strongly opposed they were to pause for three hours to allow sufficient artillery to be moved forward. In this last case the 2nd and 62nd Divisions were to go forward to the third objective. Six brigades of field artillery and one brigade of heavy were allotted to each of the two attacking divisions,[1] five other heavy brigades remaining available for counter-battery and special work.

Two companies (less one section) of the 15th Tank Battalion were assigned to the 3rd Division and one section to the Guards.

In the Guards Division (Major-General T. G. Matheson), on the left of the corps, the 2nd Guards Brigade (Br.-General B. N. Sergison-Brooke) holding the line, was, with the aid of a machine-gun barrage, to take the first objective; the 1st (Br.-General C. R. Champion de Crespigny), the second;

[1] To the Guards Division: the divisional artillery of the Guards, 2nd and 21st (one) and one Army Brigade R.H.A. and the XXXIX Brigade R.G.A., under Br.-General F. A. Wilson.
To the 3rd Division: the divisional artillery of the 3rd and 62nd and two Army Brigades R.F.A., and the LXXXVIII Brigade R.G.A., under Br.-General J. S. Ollivant.

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and the 3rd (Br.-General G. B. S. Follett)[1] was to secure the third.

The 2nd Guards Brigade went forward at 5.20 a.m., using all three battalions. The 3/Grenadier Guards had the task of clearing the Hindenburg Line, and did so from north to south without great difficulty. The 1/Coldstream and 1/Scots Guards made the eastward advance ; but the former, on the left, was held up by wire in the dry bed of the canal commanded by a strong enemy machine-gun post constructed under the débris of the demolished bridge on the Demicourt–Graincourt road. This post was rushed ;[2] but the delay entailed caused the barrage to be lost, and as the XVII Corps troops on the left were not yet up, heavy fire from that flank struck the Coldstream. They were forced to halt two hundred yards short of the Hindenburg Support. There they hung on, protecting their left flank, until the advance of the XVII Corps troops at 2.40 p.m. caused the surrender of the Germans in front of them. On the right wing of the 2nd Guards Brigade, the Scots Guards crossed the dry bed of the canal, which had been reconnoitred by patrols on the previous night, without much opposition, and, keeping well up to the barrage, captured the Hindenburg Support against stubborn resistance ; they were on the first objective by 7 a.m.

The 1/Irish Guards, of the 1st Brigade, had been ordered to follow the right of the 2nd Brigade, and in spite of some casualties by machine-gun fire from the Hindenburg Support, the battalion passed through the 1/Scots Guards at the first objective punctually at 7.10 a.m. Opposition came mainly from the northern outskirts of Flesquières, and from a sugar factory, beyond the second objective, on slightly higher ground north-east of the village. By 11 a.m., the 3rd Division having captured Flesquières, the Irish Guards were abreast of the village, but still a quarter of a mile short of the sugar factory. The 2/Coldstream, on the left, though reinforced by the 2/Grenadier Guards, owing to fire from Graincourt not yet taken by the XVII Corps, found it impossible to reach the second objective until about 4 p.m.,

[1] Killed during the morning, when Lieut.-Colonel J. C. Brand took over command until the 29th on which date he handed over to Br.-General C. P. Heywood.

[2] By Captain C. H. Frisby, who was awarded the V.C., and four men, of whom Lance-Cpl. T. N. Jackson also received the V.C. posthumously.

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after Graincourt had been captured by the 57th Division. Until then the 2/Coldstream formed a defensive flank facing north, and the front of the Guards Division ran obliquely from near Flesquières north-westward. Meanwhile three tanks had arrived and advanced on the sugar factory; they were all knocked out, but their appearance diverted attention and enabled a platoon of the 1/Grenadier Guards (3rd Guards Brigade), about noon, to work up a sunken road and take in flank the Germans in and about the sugar factory and bring about their surrender. Thus in the end the 1st Guards Brigade was able to take possession of the whole of the second objective.

The 3rd Guards Brigade was due to pass through the second objective at 9.50 a.m., but was forced to wait. Lieut.-Colonel Lord Gort, now in command of the brigade, seizing the opportunity offered by the surrender of the sugar factory, at 12.15 p.m. ordered the 1/Grenadier Guards to advance and the 1/Welsh Guards to follow and guard the open left flank.[1] The Grenadiers, leaving a defensive right flank, reached a trench nearly a mile ahead, within 400 yards of Premy Chapel on a knoll at the eastern end of Flesquières ridge, and made touch with the left of the 62nd Division; but, as will be seen, the troops of this division were counter-attacked and fell back to a trench about a thousand yards east of the sugar factory and running towards Orival Wood. To this the Grenadiers also withdrew.

The 2nd Division (Major-General C. E. Pereira) had been warned that it might be required to pass through the Guards Division. Its leading brigade, the 6th (Br.-General F. G. Willan) had therefore bivouacked behind the Guards, and on the morning of the 27th had crossed the Canal du Nord in rear of the 3rd Guards Brigade. By 2 p.m. it had closed up and was north of Flesquières. Orders were in due course given to Br.-General Willan to attack the Cantaing Line, and at 5 p.m., under a smoke barrage, two battalions went forward through the 3rd Guards Brigade. They could not, however, make much ground; but they took over the front and extended to cover the whole of the divisional frontage, so that at night all troops of the Guards Division could be withdrawn.

[1] Lieut.-Colonel Lord Gort was twice wounded on this day and was awarded the V.C. for conspicuous gallantry.

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The engineers and pioneers of the Guards Division constructed several passages over the Canal du Nord. Two bridges for pack animals were ready by 9.30 a.m.; a bridge on the Demicourt–Flesquières road by 11.30 a.m., and a crossing by ramps down into and out of the dry bed south of this road was finished by 1 p.m. Attempts were made to build a bridge on the Demicourt–Graincourt road, but failed owing to the site being under machine-gun fire all the morning from a post 700 yards to the north-east; but by 1.10 a.m. a passage by means of ramps in and out of the canal was ready.

On the right of the Guards Division, the 3rd Division (Major-General C. J. Deverell) faced the entrance to the Havrincourt–Ribecourt valley, sometimes known as "Grand Ravin," and the western end of Flesquières ridge, with the Hindenburg Support athwart its line of advance. The divisional front was held by the 8th Brigade (Br.-General B. D. Fisher), on the left, and the 9th Brigade (Br.-General H. C. Potter), and they were to take the first objective. This captured, the 76th Brigade (Br.-General C. L. Porter) was to pass through the 8th and, with the 9th which had a thousand yards less than the 8th to go to the first objective, make for the second objective. At 9.50 a.m.—an hour arranged between Major-Generals Sir R. Whigham and Deverell—the 62nd Division was to pass through and take over from the 3rd Division. During the previous day the engineers of the 3rd Division had carried out extensive work in establishing communication across the Canal du Nord west of Havrincourt, where it ran in a cutting a hundred feet deep; and during the night of the 26th/27th they built a timber-trestle bridge, to take medium artillery, on the extreme left, which was ready by 3 a.m., although the area was enfiladed by enemy machine-gun fire.

The artillery support has already been mentioned. The barrage to be provided was somewhat complicated, because the first objective lay, as already mentioned, obliquely across the front and, further, the left of the IV Corps to the south was not going to attack until Zero plus 3 hours, To protect the right flank during these three hours a smoke barrage was to be fired along the Hindenburg Line south of the divisional boundary. Two companies (less one section) of the 15th Tank Battalion were allotted to the 3rd Division. These were to co-operate with the 8th and 76th Brigades in the attack against Flesquières and the Hindenburg Support.

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The 8th Brigade went forward at 5.20 a.m. and met with considerable opposition, chiefly on the right from the railway embankment and a copse north of it. This was overcome by outflanking movements, and the first objective reached by 6.45 a.m. Of the eight tanks with the brigade, two were ditched, but the others went on and gave great assistance later to the 76th Brigade.

When the 9th Brigade went forward, as the 42nd Division (IV Corps), on the right was not attacking until 8.20 a.m., the right company of the right battalion the 13/King's stood fast to keep touch with its southern neighbour. The trenches which formed the first objective were reached in fourteen minutes, but in them stout resistance was offered, and it was only after three-quarters of an hour's hard fighting that they were completely mopped up.[1]

In the advance from the first to the second objective, the left battalion of the 9th Brigade, the 1/Northumberland Fusiliers, had farther to go than the King's on its right, and at 7.10 a.m., under a barrage, in company with troops of the 76th Brigade on its left, it went forward to an intermediate objective under some haphazard machine-gun fire. From this line the general advance was resumed at 8.20 a.m. No very great resistance was met with until within rifle range of Ribecourt and the second objective, which touched its outskirts, was seen. The reserve, the 4/Royal Fusiliers, then went through to capture the village, which had been bombed by the R.A.F. and set on fire. Owing to strong opposition it was not until 11.30 a.m. that, with the assistance of the 2/4th K.O.Y.L.I. of the 62nd Division on the right, complete possession of Ribecourt was obtained.

The 76th Brigade duly passed through the 8th at the first objective at 7.10 a.m. After hard fighting, the left, with the help of the tanks, captured and passed over the Hindenburg Support and through Flesquières to a trench on the eastern side of that village. There it suffered a good deal from fire from the sugar factory on the left, besides artillery fire at close range, and could make no farther progress; but the right worked up the Hindenburg Support, assisted by the tanks, and reached the second objective alongside the 9th Brigade.

[1] They were held by two regiments on the inner flanks of the *20th* and *6th Divisions*. At evening only 80 men of the *62nd Regiment* of the *20th* could be collected. Both divisions were withdrawn on 1st October after having suffered heavy casualties. The *6th* lost 1,550 prisoners in September.

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The 62nd (2nd West Riding) Division (Major-General Sir R. Whigham), was to pass through the 3rd at the second objective. From this line its troops would still be covered by the original barrage, but only for a period of 36 minutes on the left and 110 minutes on the right; later, at 9.20 a.m., some batteries began moving frontwards to give closer support. The 185th Brigade (Br.-General Viscount Hampden), on the left, and the 187th Brigade (Br.-General A. J. Reddie) began to move forward early. They were across the canal by 7.15 a.m., the 185th then continued the attack of the 76th Brigade, and took the northern part of the second objective, which the latter had failed to reach, up to time at 9.50 a.m.

At this hour the right of the Guards Division was still held up by the Flesquières sugar factory, and the left flank being open, the 185th Brigade suffered serious casualties. The reserve, the 8/West Yorkshire, was put in and two companies of this battalion reached the outskirts of Marcoing, and on the left got touch with the Guards at the farthest trench which they reached a little short of Premy Chapel. The West Yorkshire were in the course of time driven back by the Germans who were on Premy Chapel Hill, and later a counter-attack from the same hill by a fresh division[1] struck both the 185th Brigade and the 3rd Guards Brigade, and both were compelled to fall back from the Orival Wood trenches; the former eventually occupied the support trench of the Hindenburg Support, in order to secure a clear jumping-off place for the 186th Brigade next morning.[2]

The 187th Brigade, in its advance on the right of the 185th, also met with considerable opposition. It has been seen that the leading battalion assisted the 3rd Division in the capture of Ribecourt. It was thus delayed and lost the barrage, and as the 42nd Division (IV Corps), on the right, failed to capture the high ground to the south of the valley in which Ribecourt lies, the brigade could not advance more than half a mile beyond the eastern edge of Ribecourt.

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[1] An *Eingreif* (super-counter attack) division, the *3rd Naval*.

[2] About 1 p.m. the G.O.C. 185th Brigade reported that the enemy was massing on Premy Chapel Hill for a counter-attack, but a Guards officer, coming back wounded, reported that the Grenadiers were in possession of the hill. It could not therefore be shelled, and when the mistake was discovered it was too late.

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The 62nd Division, although some of its troops had in the morning reached the outskirts of Marcoing, had therefore, in the end, to be content, in spite of strenuous fighting, with an advance of not much more than a thousand yards beyond the second objective.

The IV Corps (Lieut.-General Sir M. Harper),[1] advancing over the ridges and valleys of the high ground south of and falling towards the Ribecourt–Marcoing valley, had to form the southern flank of the advance of the Third Army. Thus the first objective of the other corps did not extend to its front. Its own first objective, which name will be adhered to here, was a continuation of the second objective of its northern neighbours. It has already been pointed out that the left wing of the 42nd Division of the IV Corps was to advance at Zero + 3 hours, that is 8.20 a.m., to co-operate with the movement of the VI Corps at that hour to the second objective; the right wing of the 42nd Division and the whole of the 5th Division south of it were, however, to start at 7.52 a.m. in order to occupy the higher ground on the right and centre before the left wing moved.

The Hindenburg front system lay sharply oblique across the front, but the attacking divisions were well furnished with artillery for the purpose of at least smothering the heavy fire from the trenches and machine-gun posts which they were bound to meet in a daylight attack. Six brigades of field artillery[2] and the XC. Brigade R.G.A. were allotted to the 42nd Division, and five field brigades and the LVI Brigade R.G.A. to the 5th[3]. This left two heavy brigades for counter-battery work. Further, six heavy trench-mortar batteries were attached to the 42nd Division and four to the 5th to begin the attack by a hurricane bombardment, and then take part in the creeping barrage up to the limit of their range; and one company of the 11th Tank Battalion was allotted to each division.

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[1] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. R. G. Parker; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. W. H. V. Darell; C.R.A., Br.-Gen. J. G. Geddes; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. T. E. Marshall; C.E., Br.-Gen. C. M. Carpenter.

[2] The divisional brigades of the 37th and 42nd Divisions and two Army brigades, under Br.-General F. W. H. Walshe.

[3] Its own two, one each from the 63rd and 38th Divisions, and the III New Zealand Brigade, under Br.-General A. H. Hussey.

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At 4 a.m. on the 27th in the 42nd (East Lancashire) Division (Major-General A. Solly Flood) the outpost companies of the 126th Brigade (Br.-General T. H. S. Marchant) were withdrawn and the front was cleared for the 127th Brigade (Br.-General Hon. A. M. Henley), and the 125th Brigade (Br.-General H. Fargus), assembled just in rear. At 8.20 a.m. the 127th Brigade went forward, very soon losing four of its six tanks by direct hits. In spite of severe losses, it reached the second objective, taking many prisoners, and even went as far as the Villers Plouich–Ribecourt road beyond it. But both flanks being open, the battalions could not retain this advanced position, and swung back about 3.30 p.m. pivoting on Ribecourt, by then in possession of the 3rd Division, to the second objective, forming a defensive right flank to connect with the 125th Brigade.

This last brigade had advanced at 7.52 a.m., but was met by very heavy fire in front from machine guns which the barrage did not seem to have touched, and from Beaucamp on the right, which the 5th Division had not yet taken. It reached an intermediate objective about five hundred yards from the front line and towards noon a line a little beyond this; but there it had to remain.

The front line of the 5th Division (Major-General J. Ponsonby), which still had four battalions in each brigade,[1] lay near the crest of a ridge, south-west of Highland Ridge, overlooking the Couillet valley in which are Gouzeaucourt and Villers Plouich, with Beaucamp nestling between two spurs at its northern end. In order to reach the Army second objective the division had to make a wheel, advancing only four hundred yards on the right and fifteen hundred yards on the left. To adjust the difference, the 15th Brigade (Br.-General R. D. F. Oldman), on the left, was first to gain an intermediate objective, whilst the 13th Brigade (Br.-General A. T. Beckwith), on the right, went straight to the second, and then stood fast until the 15th came up, when both brigades were to advance together to the third objective. One company of the 11th Tank Battalion was told off to the division, and in addition to the artillery barrage, oil drums were to be projected on to the high ground surrounding Beaucamp on the south.

[1] It had been in Italy when Mr. Lloyd George ordered the reduction of the brigades on the Western Front to three battalions. See "1918" Vol. I, pp. 51–4.

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At 7.52 a.m. the 15th Brigade started with six tanks, five of which were immediately knocked out, but under the barrage, the oil perhaps having contributed, it entered Beaucamp, and reached the second objective greatly assisted by the remaining tank, which after doing good service in the village, was also put out of action. Little further progress could be made. The fortunes of the 13th Brigade were somewhat similar, and about 4.45 p.m. strong bombing attacks drove both brigades back beyond the second objective, half-way to the starting line.

On the right of the 5th Division, three companies of the 21st Division (V. Corps) had advanced to cover the former's flank, They reached the objective trench at once, but could not get touch of the 5th Division. After holding on all day, they fell back at 7 p.m. before an attack in force.

At 2.30 p.m. the G.O.C. IV Corps had become aware that his attack had failed to make the expected progress, and at 3.30 p.m. he issued orders for it to be resumed at 6.30 p.m. by the 42nd Division and at 7.2. p.m. by the 5th; but later, when further information came in, the operation was postponed until 2.30 and 3.2 a.m. respectively on the 28th.

The IV Corps, handicapped by a late start, although it had the shortest distance to go, had made less progress than the other corps of the Third Army. All had, indeed, made an advance over deliberately planned defences, which would have been hailed as a great victory in 1916 at the Somme, and that without the volume of artillery support then customary. It must be admitted that the fighting power of the German divisions had somewhat waned since those days, and that as practical tactics for holding the British back the 1916 slogan " not an inch of ground to be given up," had shown itself to be more effective than the new theories of elastic yielding and counter-attack by *Eingreif* divisions. More might have been accomplished by the Third Army had the operations been better synchronized and co-ordinated. The attack of the outworks and parapet of a fortress is more complicated than manoeuvres in the open field; it requires more careful reconnaissance, the previous destruction or smothering of the buttresses serving as flanks to the defence, and more detailed direction both before and during the action than was provided.

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CHAPTER IV

Battle of the Canal du Nord (*continued*)

28th September

The Third and First Armies

(Sketches 4, 6)

On the 28th September the Argonne offensive of the American and French forces[1] and the "Hindenburg Line" offensive of the British Third and First Armies were continued, and the Flanders offensive of the British Second Army and Belgian Army was begun,[2] the two latter operations being highly successful. How disastrous a day it was for the enemy may be judged by the fact that at 6 p.m. General Ludendorff went to the room of Field-Marshal von Hindenburg at O.H.L. in Spa to confess he had come to the fateful conclusion that the situation could only grow worse and that they must make a peace offer and request an armistice. The Field-Marshal replied that he had intended to say the same thing to him that evening.[3] An officer was at once sent to the Chancellor. The account of the Council held at 10 a.m. next day will be given in due course.

The Third Army[4] on the 28th advanced a distance varying from 2,000 yards on the right to 5,000 yards on the left. It passed over the Marquion–Cantaing Line and part of the Hindenburg Support, and on the left reached the Schelde canal from Marcoing northwards to the Army boundary. The First Army[5] made similar good progress, the right of the Canadian Corps, in line with the Third Army, capturing the Marcoing Line, whilst its left formed a flank reaching to the Sensée canal. Thus the two Armies had in two days made a considerable breach, 12 miles wide and six miles deep, into the German defences.

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[1] See Sketch 2.

[2] See Chapter V.

[3] Ludendorff, p. 721.

[4] See Sketch 6

[5] See Sketch 4.

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THE THIRD ARMY

The Third Army[1] issued orders on the evening of the 27th for the continuation of the battle. The VI and XVII Corps were given the principal rôle and were to seize the crossings of the Scheldė canal; the IV was to cover the right of the VI Corps by advancing to Welsh Ridge on the eastern side of the Couillet valley. The V Corps was again to stand fast, but keep contact with the IV.

Contrary to the procedure in the timing on the previous day, the right was to move first. In the IV Corps, Lieut.-General Harper, in order to fulfil his task, gave orders at 8.25 p.m. on the 27th for an early start, so as to get level with the VI before the latter began its advance. The 42nd Division, next to the VI Corps, was to move forward at 2.30 a.m., and the 5th Division, at 3.2. a.m.(later altered to 2.40 a.m.); they were to take the third objective set for the 27th, and then both divisions were to gain a footing on Welsh Ridge. By arrangement with Lieut.-General Haldane, the 62nd Division, the right of the VI Corps, was to co-operate in the movement of the 42nd Division.

The night was very dark and rainy, but the attack was a complete success; the enemy was surprised; very little opposition was encountered and many prisoners were taken. Under barrages[2] moving a hundred yards in 5 minutes, the front lines of the 125th and 127th Brigades of the 42nd Division and of the 187th Brigade of the 62nd Division went forward in succession at 2.30 a.m., 3.58 a.m. and 4.35 a.m., respectively, as the barrage on the right drew level with them. The third objective, on Highland Ridge, was secured right up to the Hindenburg Support, and in the VI Corps sector the line itself was captured as far as the point reached by the 185th Brigade, the left of the 62nd Division, on the previous day. A squadron of the 3rd Hussars was now sent forward by the 42nd Division to reconnoitre, and its patrols reached Good Old Man Farm, where infantry later relieved them; but farther to the left they were stopped by fire from the north end of Welsh Ridge. The infantry patrols of the

[1] See Sketch 6.

[2] On the second and succeeding days of an attack the calculation of the barrage presented many difficulties; for the line was seldom static and never straight, and the exact position of the foremost infantry always uncertain. To prevent mishaps the artillery as often as not "cocked on" a couple of hundred yards to the supposed range.

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42nd Division made good progress eastwards across the Couillet valley; so Major-General Solly-Flood ordered the attack to be resumed in the afternoon, when the 125th and 126th Brigades (the latter passing through the 127th), after some opposition, reached the top of Welsh Ridge, the objective of the division.

The 5th Division, on the right of the 42nd, was not so successful in its 2.40 a.m. attack. As the 13th Brigade had suffered considerable casualties, on receipt of the corps orders of 8.25 p.m. on the 27th, Major-General Ponsonby decided that the 95th Brigade, then in reserve two to four miles behind the front, should be brought up to pass through the 15th Brigade. That done, the latter brigade would side-slip and relieve the 13th, which until then would stand fast, as it was expected that a successful advance of the 95th Brigade on to the high ground overlooking Villers Plouich would so outflank and overlook the Germans opposite to the 13th Brigade that they would be forced to evacuate their position. This expectation proved to be justified.

The 95th Brigade, brought up at short notice, managed to reach the jumping-off line only just before Zero at 2.40 a.m. without having had time to reconnoitre. It encountered very considerable opposition near Beaucamp, and it was not until about 8 a.m., after that village had been captured, that the second objective of the previous day was taken. The brigade then had to resort to trench warfare methods and it did not reach until evening the next objective, a road beyond Villers Plouich, on the western slopes of Welsh Ridge. In the meantime the 13th Brigade had to endure heavy shelling. There was some compensation; for in the course of the morning aircraft patrols reported that the enemy near Gouzeaucourt had evacuated his front line and was retiring. The brigade then went forward and by 11 a.m. had occupied, without opposition, the whole of its objective of the previous day.

The 15th Brigade duly took over from the 13th, and at 5.15 p.m. moved forward without a barrage. With very little difficulty it drew level with the 95th Brigade, thus completing the task of the 5th Division and of the IV Corps, of covering the right of the VI Corps.

The 62nd Brigade, holding the line of the 21st Division (V Corps) on the right of the 13th Brigade, as early as 7 a.m.,

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found the trenches in front of it evacuated and advanced through Gouzeaucourt, also without opposition. Later in the morning, the 110th Brigade, on the right again in the Gauche Wood sector, also advanced almost unopposed and connected with the 62nd Brigade.

In the VI Corps the 187th Brigade, after co-operating in the preliminary attack of the 5th and 42nd Divisions of the IV Corps, was to take part in the main attack by the 62nd and 2nd Divisions at 6.30 a.m. and to advance against Masnières on the Schelde canal, whilst the 186th, passing through the 185th, was to take Marcoing and the crossing of the canal east of that village and form a small bridgehead.[1] All details were settled at a 62nd Division conference at 185th Brigade headquarters in a dug-out in the Hindenburg Support, which was attended by all the battalion commanders. The artillery barrage was provided by the same brigades as on the previous day.

In the first stage of the attack the 62nd Division did well against varying opposition. The right of the 187th Brigade reached the Marcoing Line, and the left a trench which continued this line northwards; the 186th Brigade first took a trench just west of Marcoing, then, after some fighting, cleared the village, and finally established itself on the western bank of the canal, which here is 50 yards wide, and quite deep. Owing either to deliberate demolition or to shelling, the lock gates had been damaged, and the water had run out, leaving several feet of mud, a worse obstacle for assault-bridging than water. Nevertheless, a small party of the 2/4th Hampshire pushed across by the upper lock gates and then, under cover of Lewis gun fire from the top storeys of houses in Marcoing, the 5/Duke of Wellington's, according to plan in two echelons, aided by the 460th and 461st Field Companies R.E., crossed the canal over the destroyed bridge in single file, and by 11 a.m. was aligned along the railway embankment beyond. Fire stopped any advance against the Marcoing Line, here on the eastern bank, and the 187th Brigade was also checked. Fresh attacks under artillery barrages at 6 p.m. and 6.30 p.m. respectively for the left and right brigades,[2] were therefore ordered by

[1] The 186th Brigade had a "supply tank" allotted to it, which proved invaluable for sending forward trench mortars, s.a.a., wire, etc.

[2] 2.30 p.m. had at first been suggested, but the artillery barrage could not be arranged by that hour.

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Major-General Whigham ; the 187th Brigade subsequently reached the canal bend, and its left built up a line around Marcoing Copse, whilst its right got touch of the 42nd Division, which was not so far forward. The 5/Duke of Wellington's took the part of the Marcoing Line in the sector of the 186th Brigade and reached the objective, its support trench, taking many prisoners. There the centre and left were counter-attacked from the east and fired on in rear, the prisoners, insufficiently guarded, picking up rifles and joining in. The two central companies succeeded in retiring to the railway embankment ; the left was nearly surrounded and had to fight its way back, driving the Germans behind it into the canal and taking 38 prisoners, besides inflicting heavy casualties. The right maintained itself in the Marcoing Line.

The 2nd Division (which had relieved the Guards during the night) had in front of it wide bare slopes open to observation in daylight, so its starting time was fixed by Lieut.-General Haldane at 5.15 a.m., that is 75 minutes earlier than its right-hand neighbour. Its first objectives were the Cantaing Line and Nine Wood, but the 99th and 6th Brigades which were to execute the attack were to be prepared to go farther. The barrage was fired by five brigades of field artillery and one of garrison artillery.

Little opposition was encountered until the Cantaing Line was near, when both brigades came under heavy fire, but pushed on. The 99th was unable to effect a crossing of the Schelde canal, but kept the bridges under fire and so prevented the enemy from destroying them. The 6th, after easily carrying the Cantaing Line en route, succeeded about 9 a.m. in passing a small party of the 1/King's over the canal at the lock bridge on the extreme left and seizing the lock-keeper's house. Fire then became so heavy that no one else could cross. An attack by the reserve battalion, the 17/Royal Fusiliers, was therefore arranged for dusk, 5.15 p.m. when two companies gradually filtered across the lock bridge to the cover of the eastern bank. A footing was also gained in the front trench of the Marcoing Line and touch obtained with the troops of the 57th Division on the left, which were also over the canal. But at 2.30 a.m. on the 29th the enemy counter-attacked and for a time drove the two companies back across the canal. They were not to be beaten, and advancing once more regained their positions on the eastern bank of the canal.

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Thus as a result of the operations, on the left and in the centre, the divisions of the VI Corps were across or close to the canal, and facing the Marcoing Line; and on the right, where the canal turned and passed behind the Marcoing Line, they were beyond that line. The situation for the next day was, therefore, favourable.

On the night of the 27th/28th the XVII Corps was for the most part on the second objective, with the 188th Brigade of the 63rd Division in the centre, and the 172nd and 171st of the 57th on either side of it. Before them lay the Marquion Line; beyond on the lower slopes of the Schelde valley was the third objective, marked by the road Nine Wood–Cantaing—Fontaine Notre Dame (in the Canadian Corps area), and beyond again was the Marcoing Line, partly behind and partly in front of the Schelde canal, which here turns eastward into Cambrai.

Lieut.-General Fergusson's orders were for the whole of the 57th Division to continue the attack and secure crossings over the Schelde canal, and for the 63rd to be ready to pass through the 57th and exploit success. The two brigades of the 57th Division in the line advanced at 6.15 a.m. The 172nd was supported by four brigades of field artillery[1], which had fired a slow bombardment on the Cantaing and Marquion Lines from 5.15 a.m.—at which hour the 2nd Division, on its right, had gone forward—and at 6.30 a.m. began a creeping barrage. Eleven batteries of heavy artillery also fired on Cantaing and on selected targets. The attack was a complete success and the (third) objective was captured by 8.30 a.m. Patrols were then sent towards the Schelde canal.

The 171st Brigade, its front narrowed by Fontaine Notre Dame being in the Canadian Corps sector, was covered by the Canadian barrage. It took its objectives without opposition.

At 11 a.m. the 170th Brigade (Br.-General A. L. Ransome) passed through the 172nd and 171st to seize the crossings, three bridges, of the Schelde canal. The R.A.F. gave the 57th Division considerable assistance by low-flying attacks and by reporting the retirement of the enemy across the

[1] Two of the 52nd Division and two Army brigades, under Br.-General W. C. E. Rudkin of the 57th Division.

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canal. It also bombed two German headquarters south-east and north-east of Cambrai.

The left of the 170th Brigade was held up in front of the wire of the Marcoing Line. The 2/5th King's Own, on the right, after passing through the woods on the western bank, was checked at the canal, one bridge being blown up when the attackers were within ten yards of it, and the others strongly defended. It was not until 2 p.m., three hours after the start, that the two left companies, covered by Stokes' mortar fire, succeeded in crossing by the lock bridge of the canal, near the Cantaing–Cambrai road; but they were stopped at the course of the Schelde beyond it. The right company, towards 7 p.m., forced a passage at the lock 700 yards farther south, where the canal and river run in the same channel, entered the Marcoing Line and gained touch with the 2nd Division troops. This company suffered the same counter-attack at 2.30 a.m. (29th), as did the 2nd Division.

Meantime the 63rd Division, the 189th Brigade leading, had, about 12.15 p.m., arrived at the first objective of the 57th Division, and at 3 p.m., by corps instructions, it sent the 189th Brigade forward. The Drake Battalion was detailed as advanced guard and the Hood Battalion to mop up the woods; the former reached the canal and got two platoons over in support of the left of the King's Own; but, like that battalion, it could do no more. Further operations were, therefore, postponed until next day.

During the night the 249th Field Company R.E., without interference, laid two pontoon bridges across the canal and the river, a hundred yards apart, half-way between the two locks.

The Third Army could congratulate itself on a very satisfactory day.

The First Army

At 6.50 p.m. on the 27th the First Army [1] directed the Canadian Corps to "endeavour to secure crossings over "the Canal de l'Escaut [Schelde] to-night", and to reach

[1] See Sketch 4.

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the distant objectives beyond the line Morenchies–Blécourt–Aubencheul au Bac, defined in the orders of the 18th. Such an advance meant over-running the Marcoing Line that covered Cambrai, the centre of which town lay less than four miles away. Twenty-five minutes later Lieut.-General Currie passed on an order to his divisions to continue to gain ground during the night, wherever advance was possible, with the object of preventing the enemy from establishing a defensive line. He added that a general advance was to be made by the 3rd, 4th and 1st Canadian Divisions and the 11th Division at 6 a.m. on the 28th, and they were to arrange the co-ordination of the barrages on their flanks between themselves. Brutinel's motorized troops were to be ready to exploit any success, and the 2nd Cavalry Division was to move up. The tanks which had been in action with the 1st and 4th Canadian Divisions during the day would be in reserve.

It will be seen by reference to the sketch that at the close of the fighting on the 27th, the left wing (1st Canadian and 11th Divisions) of the Canadian Corps, with a long defensive flank, was well ahead of the right wing (4th Canadian with the 3rd Canadian behind it) which had remained on the third objective, and that the right wing was similarly ahead of the XVII Corps. At 11.15 p.m., therefore, Lieut.-General Currie issued further orders: the 3rd Canadian Division was at once to relieve all troops of the 4th on or east of the third objective, except on the northern sector of about twelve hundred yards: all troops of the 4th Canadian Division holding its defensive right flank were to come under the 3rd and remain so until that flank was rendered unnecessary by the advance of the XVII Corps; the 3rd Canadian Division was, as soon as possible, to complete the capture of Fontaine Notre Dame, on its right front. The 1st Canadian and 11th Divisions being in advance of the others, their zero hour was made 9 a.m. instead of 6 a.m. The 11th and 12th Canadian Brigades of the 4th Canadian Division in the line were to be relieved by the 9th and 7th of the 3rd Canadian Division at once; but at a conference of their commanders it was decided that the best way to carry out this operation was for the relieving brigades to pass through the line when they attacked next morning. It was arranged later that the 10th Canadian Brigade, the reserve of the 4th Canadian Division, should similarly pass through the left of the 12th and cover the whole of the reduced divisional front.

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The 9th Canadian Brigade (Br.-General D. M. Ormond) assembled in the early morning of the 28th on the eastern edge of Bourlon Wood and passed through the 11th at 6 a.m. under a barrage fired by two field artillery brigades and accompanied by four tanks of the 7th Tank Battalion. Fontaine Notre Dame was taken easily by two companies; but the enemy barrage then came down and heavy machine-gun fire struck the rest of the brigade in front of the Marcoing Line and brought it to a stop. It could make no further progress in spite of often renewed efforts and of a second organized attack at 4 p.m., enemy resistance becoming stronger rather than weaker.

In the 7th Canadian Brigade (Br.-General J. A. Clarke), the Royal Canadian Regiment, supported by three brigades of field artillery, with three tanks leading, advanced without much difficulty to within two hundred yards of the Marcoing Line, where, like the battalions of the 9th, it was stopped by fire. The wire was thick, but a narrow gap was found in it on the left, and after heavy fighting and the repulse of a counter-attack, the Royal Canadian Regiment established itself by 12.30 p.m. in the front trench of the Marcoing Line on the whole brigade front; but it could advance no farther.

On the left, the 10th Canadian Brigade of the 4th Canadian Division, for whose support six brigades of field artillery were allotted,[1] started at 4.15 a.m. from Quarry Wood, 2⅛ miles behind the front, and after passing through the line at first met with little opposition; but it was only after severe fighting that the 47th and 50th Battalions took Raillencourt, Sailly and the portion of the Marcoing Line immediately to the south.[2] The 44th and 46th, following closely, continued on at 8 a.m.; the former reached the Cambrai Sailly light railway and the latter cleared the northern portion of the Marcoing Line. About 10 a.m. the enemy began determined counter-attacks against the 44th Battalion; these continued throughout the morning and afternoon, but without avail, although, as the brigades

[1] Two fired the first 2,200 yards of the barrage; two from 2,200 to 4,000; and two from 4,000 to 8,000, assisted by the XXXIV Brigade R.G.A.

[2] This sector was held by the *187th* and *1st Guard Reserve Divisions*. The former was due for relief; but on account of British artillery fire, by the morning of the 28th only one relieving battalion of the *207th Division* had appeared.

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of the 3rd Canadian Division were not yet up, the right flank was open.[1]

About 1 p.m. the 3rd Canadian Division (Major-General F. O. W. Loomis) issued orders for the renewal of the attack of the 9th and 7th Canadian Brigades, with organized barrages, at 7 p.m., the 10th Brigade co-operating on the left. For the 9th Canadian Brigade two companies of the 58th Battalion, starting from the part of the Marcoing Line held by the 7th Canadian Brigade and working to the right, succeeded in clearing the sector on its own brigade's front. Such heavy fire then came from the right that it had to halt and face towards that direction; the 116th Battalion, then behind it, continued the advance and pushed patrols to the outskirts of Ste. Olle, which stands on a slight ridge and was found to be strongly held. For the 7th Canadian Brigade, the 49th Battalion and the Princess Patricia's Canadian L.I. reached a road west of Ste. Olle, and the light railway a thousand yards east of Sailly; the P.P.C.L.I. even went much beyond this line, but was brought up by hidden wire near the Çambrai–Douai road, and after heavy casualties had to fall back to the light railway. On the left, the 44th and 46th Battalions of the 10th Canadian Brigade fought their way forward, first the left of the 46th, then its right, and then the 44th, to the Cambrai–Douai road; although their right was exposed, by 3 a.m. on the 29th they had established themselves there on the whole brigade front, in touch with the 1st Canadian Division on the left. The right wing of the Canadian Corps was now up level with the left wing and in touch on the right with the Third Army.

The 1st Canadian Division had failed to make any progress. Its short frontage of a little more than a mile was on the morning of the 28th held by the 10th Battalion of the 2nd Canadian Brigade. Orders for the attack at 9 a.m. were not received by this battalion until daylight, and it was then found that the barrage to be fired by two brigades of field artillery would come down exactly on the line held by its forward troops. This necessitated a withdrawal in broad daylight, which cost fifty casualties. Then at 9 a.m., although the 4th Canadian Division on the right was some way behind, and only patrols of the 11th Division on the left were going to advance, the battalion, obeying its orders,

[1] The afternoon attacks were made by the fresh *207th Division*.

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attacked alone and was naturally driven back, and even had difficulty, at the cost of another hundred casualties, in holding on to its original position until night, when it was relieved.

No general attack was made by the 11th Division; but the enemy on its front having retired to the north bank of the Sensée canal, posts were established on the left near the canal covering the Bois de Quesnoy. On the left again, the 56th Division occupied Palluel, and in the evening took the southern part of Arleux, but was driven out of it by a counter-attack at 3 a.m. on the 29th. Northward of this, no operations took place in the First Army area; the principal event of the day in this Army remained the advance of the right wing of the Canadian Corps, in conjunction with the very considerable advance of the Third Army.

The stage was now set for the attack of the Fourth Army on the 29th, but before dealing with it, the successes of the British and Belgian Armies in Flanders on the 28th will be described.

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CHAPTER V

BATTLE OF YPRES 1918[1]

THE SECOND ARMY[2]

28TH SEPTEMBER

(Sketches 7, 8[3])

The first " Instruction " for the Group of Armies of Flanders commanded by the King of the Belgians was issued on the 19th September. It was signed " au nom du roi " by General Degoutte,[4] and contained a mixture of operation orders and complementary instructions. It defined the object of the operations as :[5]

(*a*) first to break the enemy's line of resistance and gain possession as a base of departure the line Kruiseecke ridge and the crests of Passchendaele and Clercken ;

(*b*) this base acquired, to exploit the success *without delay* in accordance with secret instructions to be issued later. Great stress was laid on secrecy, and to secure this it was ordered that camouflage to cover the sites should be contrived before any works were begun : that movements should only be carried out at night : and that works should be constructed and material got into position at the highest possible speed. The mounting of the attack was to be completed by the 25th ; but the deployment of the infantry for attack was not to be carried out without further orders. The more artillery available, it was said, the better, but preparatory fire should on no account be begun before Zero day (not hour) : the infantry in the attack was to

[1] This official name covers the period 28th September–2nd October, 1918.

[2] G.O.C., Gen. Sir Herbert Plumer ; M.G.G.S., Major-Gen. J. S. J. Percy ; D.A. & Q.M.G., Major-Gen. A. A. Chichester ; M.G.R.A., Major-Gen. C. R. Buckle ; C. E., Major-Gen. Sir F. M. Glubb.

[3] The position of the Belgian-French lines is taken from Carte 36 in F.O.A. vii (i.). This map is very inaccurate as regards the position of the British, and does not always agree with the Belgian account. The site of the Flanders I Position and its switch is taken from British records ; that of Position II is conjectured from mentions of it in German regimental histories and other books.

[4] It will be found in F.O.A. vii (ii), Annexe No. 3

[5] See Sketch 7.

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proceed by bounds, at a pace to be fixed by the Army commanders: "semi-permanent and creeping barrages, "to which the infantry should always cling, will be "regulated by the pace of that arm and should accom- "pany it as far as possible".

Boundaries and objectives were then defined, and the Instruction continued:—

"The attack of the British Second Army "north of "the canal will be pushed forward so as to reach "Gheluvelt, Zandvoorde and the Kruiseecke ridge as "soon as possible" and, going dead against the expressed opinion of General Plumer, it was laid down that "it "is not necessary in the first instance to attack the "Wytschaete–Messines area, but strong pressure against "it should be maintained".

"It will be an advantage if the right flank of the "troops engaged in the frontal attack is, by a move- "ment south from Hollebeke [on the canal 2 miles "north of Houthem] covered against a possible "counter-attack; the extent of this protection will "depend on the troops of the British Second Army "available, bearing in mind that the movement, if "successful, will bring about the fall of the defence of the "Messines–Wytschaete plateau with greater ease".

Advice of similar nature was also given to the Belgian Army, which was to capture the crest of the northern end of the Ypres ridge marked by Zonnebeke–Passchendaele–Westroosebeke and Staden.

Plans were to be submitted by the two Armies concerned by the 22nd, with estimates of how long the infantry was likely to require to get into position. General Plumer had been informed by G.H.Q. three days earlier of what was required of him by Maréchal Foch, with the direction, "you should dispose your troops as you consider desirable," and he had issued his orders at 9 a.m. on the 19th before General Degoutte's Instruction arrived. He had in mind, as he told Sir Douglas Haig at an Army Commanders' Conference held on the 21st, that the Germans, although unaware of his and the Belgian preparations, were thought to be making ready to withdraw to Passchendaele ridge and to shorten their line.

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Being brief and to the point, his order will be given in extenso :

" Second Army Order No. 35, 19th September 1918.

" 1. In accordance with instructions by the Marshal " Commanding the Allied Forces, operations will be " undertaken by the Belgian Army and British Second " Army against the enemy's positions between Dixmude " and St. Eloi [3 miles south of Ypres].

" The operations will be under the command of the " King of the Belgians, who will have General Degoutte, " commanding the French Sixth Army, as Chief of the " Staff.

" The first objectives will be :—(1)

"(i) *For the Belgian Army :—*

" Clercken–Staden–Passchendaele–Broodseinde.

" (ii) *For the British Second Army :—*

" Molenaarelsthoek [south-east of Zonnebeke]–Stirling " Castle–Observatory Ridge–Hill 60–The Bluff.

" These objectives are only a line for a further " advance which will be carried out without any delay.

" 2. The offensive on the Second Army front will be " undertaken by the II and XIX Corps, composed as " under :

" II Corps : 9th and 29th Divisions in line 36th " Division in corps reserve.

" XIX Corps : 14th and 35th Divisions in line ; " 41st Division in corps reserve ; who will carry " out the attack within the boundaries shown on " attached map.[2]

" On reaching the first objective, the II Corps will at " once push forward to Becelaere, Gheluvelt and " Kruiseecke ; the XIX Corps to Zandvoorde and along " the Ypres–Comines canal.

" 3. The X Corps (30th and 34th Divisions), XV Corps " (31st and 40th Divisions), will on the day of attack

[1] See Sketches 7 and 8.

[2] Not reproduced, See Sketch 8.

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" watch their opportunity and take every advantage of " the enemy weakening on their front to press his " retirement.

" 4. Artillery instructions will be issued separately.

" 5. The date of attack will be notified later but all " preparations should be completed by 24th September.

" 6. Acknowledge.

J. Percy,
Major-General, G.S.,
Second Army.

" Issued at 9.30 a.m."

General Degoutte made no attempt to co-ordinate action at the junction of the Belgian and British Second Armies, and it was discovered by General Plumer that several points of difference required adjustment. A conference for the purpose was held at II Corps headquarters on the 24th, which was attended by staff officers from the Belgian and XIX Corps headquarters. The Belgians planned a preliminary bombardment of three to four hours' duration before the dawn attack, and a pause of fifteen minutes by the infantry in front of each of the enemy's successive lines of defence, to allow of a further bombardment of that duration before the assault was delivered. It was pointed out to them that a bombardment of several hours' duration in darkness, and consequently unobserved, would do little to destroy the enemy's defences, would give warning of attack, and probably cause the Germans to fire counter-preparation on the assembly positions; further, that in the British 9th Division's sector, next to the Belgians, the German lines were not clearly defined and did not, as far as could be ascertained, coincide with the ridges which formed the important tactical features, and that the density of the British barrage (one 18-pdr. to about forty yards) would not justify a pause of fifteen minutes when the infantry was within two hundred yards of the line to be assaulted. A minor difference was that the lifts of the British creeping barrage would be a hundred yards and those of the Belgian, a hundred metres. It was finally decided that the Belgians should have a three-hours' bombardment, and the other differences were smoothed out.

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General Plumer's artillery instructions followed his orders of the 19th :[1] no preliminary bombardment was to be fired and no increase of artillery strength disclosed before zero hour ; all batteries sent to reinforce the XIX and II Corps were to remain silent until zero hour ; the infantry barrage would be put down without previous registration ; certain field batteries and 6-inch howitzer and 60-pdr. batteries[2] were to select and camouflage forward positions to which they would move as the infantry advanced ; certain other batteries of the same nature were to be ready to go forward in close support of the attacking infantry half an hour after Zero, sections and single guns of the field artillery co-operating with infantry companies if opportunities offered ; careful reconnaisance was to be made as secretly as possible and no artillery movements carried out except after night-fall ;[3] the creeping barrage would extend to four thousand yards ; east of this zone such artillery as could fire would have time limits imposed, after which no gun-fire would be directed on areas west of certain pre-arranged lines, except observed fire from brigades affiliated to attacking infantry ; these brigades would move forward in sufficient time to take up their duty before the creeping barrage ceased altogether,

[1] The allotment of artillery to the Second Army is given in Appendix II. Six Army field brigades and ten trench mortar batteries were lent to the Belgian Army.

The artillery was allotted to corps as under :—

II Corps C.R.A. Br.-General A. D. Kirby ; C.H.A., D. F. H. Logan : 5 field artillery brigades (of the 9th, 29th and 30th Divisions) and eight (III, XXXVI Australian, XLIII, LIX, LXXII, LXXVII, LXXXVI, LXXXVIII) R.G.A. Brigades, and ten unbrigaded siege batteries ; of these, the III and LXXVII Brigades R.G.A. were to be placed under the direct orders of the commanders of the 9th and 29th Divisions respectively when the situation required ; the LIX Brigade R.G.A. with 30 guns, covered the 9th Division and the XLIII with 22 guns, the 29th ; and LXX Brigade R.G.A., with 38 guns, two Belgian divisions, the remaining 136 guns being used for counter-battery work.

XIX Corps. C.R.A. Br.-General W. B. R. Sandys ; C.H.A., F. A. Wynter : 7 field (of the 14th, 35th, 36th and 41st Divisions) and 5 R.G.A. (IV, XXV, XXXIII, LXV, XCIX) Brigades and two R.M.A. batteries.

X. Corps. C.R.A., Br.-General W. P. Monkhouse ; C.H.A., A. H. Ollivant : 4 field (of the 30th and 34th Divisions) and 2 heavy artillery (II and VI) brigades, and 2½ unbrigaded siege batteries.

XV Corps. C.R.A., Br.-General B. R. Kirwan ; C.H.A., Br.-General C. W. Collingwood : 4 field (of the 31st and 66th Divisions), 3 R.G.A. (I, XLV and LXXIX) brigades, and 3 unbrigaded siege batteries.

[2] The artillery of the 35th and 41st Divisions and the 6-inch howitzers and 60-pdrs. of the IV and X (Army reserve) Brigades, R.G.A.

[3] No abnormal air activity was allowed before zero hour.

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and would arrange to have a proportion of guns always in action; when the infantry reached the first objective artillery should search the ground in front to as great a depth as possible, but no protective barrage should be formed except with observed fire, so that the infantry would have full scope to exploit its success unrestricted by gun-fire; from zero hour onwards intense counter-battery work would be carried out on all known hostile positions, a proportion of the German batteries being neutralized with gas; any heavy batteries not required for neutralization would be used in the creeping barrage; a preliminary bombardment would be fired by the Belgian Army from Zero minus three hours to Zero minus five minutes, neutralization of all enemy batteries bearing on the Belgian front would therefore be undertaken from Zero minus three hours onwards, and in the creeping barrage part of the heavy artillery of the II Corps would also help in covering the Belgian right division; all 6-inch guns would harass roads and approaches from zero hour onwards; the X Corps artillery would put down a smoke barrage on the north of Wytschaete during the whole period of attack, neutralize all hostile batteries bearing on the offensive front and bombard the Messines–Wytschaete Ridge; the XV Corps artillery would support the X Corps in bombarding Messines and the Messines–Wytschaete Ridge, and co-operate in Army counter-battery work required by this corps.

On the 21st September General Degoutte sent out further lengthy instructions on the lines already indicated by Maréchal Foch.[1] They referred to "the manoeuvre of "exploitation which will commence immediately [under-"lined] after the conquest of the base Kruiseecke–Passchen-"daele–Clercken". The principal rôle in pursuit was assigned to the Belgian cavalry division and the French II Cavalry Corps; the French VII Corps, in reserve, was to follow the Belgian Army. The tasks assigned to the Second Army were (*a*) to cover the operation by forming a flank as quickly as possible on the river Lys from Armentières to Harlebeke, 25 miles lower down and beyond Courtrai, keeping a reserve near Becelaere (that is north of the Ypres–Menin road) to guard against German counter-attacks from the south-east; and (*b*) to form a bridgehead between Menin and Courtrai, south of the Lys, for the purpose of facilitating an

[1] Given in F.O.A. vii (ii), Annexe 5, pp. 14–16.

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offensive later in a south-easterly direction. The instruction went on to consider the various possible reactions of the enemy and how best to deal with them.

On the 24th, Vice-Admiral Sir R. Keyes, commanding the Dover Patrol, flew from Dover to visit Sir Douglas Haig, having an audience with the King of the Belgians on his return journey. The Commander-in-Chief requested him to secure Ostend as soon as the Belgians had encircled the town on the land side, and General Plumer was instructed to get into direct touch with the admiral with a view to embarking a good infantry company should he require it.

For the operations the Vice-Admiral Dover Patrol placed at the disposal of the Belgian Army the 5th Group R.A.F. (Br.-General C. L. Lambe), consisting of eight squadrons. The II Brigade (Br.-General T. I. Webb-Bowen), with sixteen squadrons, was, as already mentioned, attached to the Second Army. During the night of the 27th/28th September clouds were low and there was rain, but bombing attacks were made against the enemy railway communications, more than six tons of bombs being dropped on Busigny junction. The night fliers reported an almost continuous stream of transport along the main road between Beauvois (7 miles S.S.E. of Cambrai) and Cambrai, and much transport on the roads from Le Cateau to Bavai. During the 28th the main targets were Thourout, Cortemarck and Lichtervelde (13½ miles S.E. by S. of Bruges), and Wervicq, Menin and Roulers.

On the 28th the Fifth Army, on the right of the Second, carried out increased artillery activity, which was continued until the 30th.

The battleground of the Second Army around Ypres is well known; it is sufficient therefore to mention that the line of the first objective of the 28th September from Broodseinde in the north to Wytschaete in the south, was roughly the crest of the ridge which overlooks Ypres on the east.[1] At Wytschaete the ridge turns westward to Mont Kemmel, throwing off the Messines ridge to the south. The Germans were in possession of the ridge down to and including Wytschaete–Messines which they had lost in the Flanders

[1] See Sketch 8, the ridge is indicated on Sketch 7.

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fighting in 1917 and regained at the end of April 1918, when it was lost again by the Second Army as a consequence of the enemy success to the south in the Lys offensive and of the lack of sufficient troops to hold it. After facing Wytschaete–Messines the British front now ran south to Ploegsteert Wood and Armentières, the area west of this line, including Vierstraat, Kemmel Hill, Neuve Eglise, Nieppe, having been abandoned by the Germans in their retirement of the 30th August–6th September.[1]

The German position, a definitely selected line, not the high-tide mark of a battle, was not garrisoned in great force, there being hardly more than five divisions on the 16-mile front opposite the ten divisions (including two in Army reserve) of the Second Army[2]; but much had been done to organize the defences of the line, and utilize, for defence in depth, the pill-boxes, dug-outs and wire of the earlier periods. The real strength of the enemy position lay in the superior observation over the whole of the Ypres Salient which it afforded and the nature of the ground, whose surface had been shell-torn and fought over until every vestige of green had disappeared, and there remained only a wilderness of brownish clay, slippery and soft in wet weather, pock-marked with water-filled craters, intersected by the remains of trenches, and littered with wire, wood and broken war material and equipment, which seemed to preclude the possibility of movement over it in darkness.

On a large-scale model, constructed at General Plumer's headquarters at Cassel, parties of officers from each division were shown by their commanders the features and accidents of the ground over which the attack would be made, and they were thus able to visualize the operations and to make arrangements for mutual assistance.

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[1] See " 1918 " Vol. IV, Chapter V.

[2] From north to south, the *12th Bavarian* (which was mainly opposite the Belgians), the *40th*, *6th Bavarian Reserve* (south of the Comines canal), *11th Reserve*, *56th* and *4th* of the German *Fourth Army*. Only the last was reckoned a good division. Except the *40th*, which had been in the 18th July offensive, and the *6th Bavarian Reserve*, which had had a week's fighting near Bapaume at the end of August, all had had a long period of rest. North of the *12th Bavarian Division*, up to Dixmude, were the *11th Bavarian 13th Reserve* and the *23rd Divisions*. In reserve were the *16th Bavarian Division*, employed against the Belgians and the *52nd Reserve Division*, which came up east of Becelaere in time to rally the retiring *12th Bavarian Division*. B.O.A., page 561.

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As the main effort was made by the northern wing of the Second Army, next to the Belgians, the operations will be described from left to right.

The German reply to the Belgian bombardment before zero hour was slight, and the assembly of the British infantry was completed without interference in heavy rain, which continued into the afternoon, when the weather cleared. The early zero hour, 5.30 a.m., made a smoke barrage unnecessary at first; but when dawn broke and a south-westerly breeze sprang up smoke proved invaluable, and machine-gun nests and pill-boxes were isolated and overcome with less difficulty than had been expected. Indeed, it was a day of uninterrupted success for the attacking divisions: the German artillery reply was weak and soon died away under counter-battery action, the resistance was half-hearted, and all that had been planned, even exploitation, was accomplished.

On the left of the II Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. W. Jacob)[1] the 9th (Scottish) Division (Major-General H. H. Tudor) had the 26th and 28th[2] Brigades (Br.-Generals Hon. A. G. A. Hore-Ruthven and J. L. Jack) in the line, with the 27th (Br.-General W. D. Croft) held back for exploitation. Ahead lay first some swampy ground, then underfeatures, spurs of the Ypres Ridge, known as the Westhoek–Frezenburg ridge, Anzac Ridge, Glasgow Spur, and then, at Broodseinde, the ridge itself. By 6.45 a.m. the northern end of the Westhoek spur had been captured and patrols were in touch with the Belgian 8th Division on the left, and by 8 a.m. the whole of the spur had been taken with only slight casualties. With the help of the engineers and pioneers, the covering artillery was brought forward, although its movement was delayed by the Belgian artillery using the Ypres–Zonnebeke road; the heavy artillery concentrated fire on the areas where

[1] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. S. H. Wilson; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. R. M. Foot; C.R.A., Br.-Gen. A. D. Kirby; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. D. F. H. Logan; C.E., Br.-Gen. C. Godby.

[2] The 28th Brigade had been formed on 11th September 1918 from two battalions (from British divisions reduced to cadre) and the R. Newfoundland Battalion (from G.H.Q. Troops). It took the place of the South African Brigade, which, owing to casualties in action, had been formed into a composite regiment. When the latter brigade's battalions had been reconstituted, it was transferred as the S. African Infantry Brigade, to the 66th Division on the 23rd September, vice the 197th Brigade, reduced to training cadre.

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opposition was expected; and at 8.35 a.m. the infantry advance was resumed. Considerable opposition was encountered on Anzac Ridge, where belts of wire and groups of pill-boxes added to the difficulties of the ground; but progress was not checked, and by 11.30 a.m. the two brigades were in possession of the main ridge from Polygon Wood to Broodseinde, the first objective. By 12.30 p.m. it was evident that they held it firmly, with the Belgians up on the left, and the 29th Division, on the right, in Gheluvelt; so Major-General Tudor ordered the 27th Brigade, then at Westhoek ridge, to exploit southwards, capturing Becelaere. Some delay occurred in transmission of orders, and it was not until after 2.30 p.m. that the brigade left its position of deployment north-east of Polygon Wood. On approaching Becelaere, the right, the 12/Royal Scots, was attacked in flank from the gap existing between the 9th and 29th Divisions, but drove the assailants off; just north of the village three German batteries galloped up the slope and came into action, firing into the left of the 11/Royal Scots; but they were immediately engaged and finally silenced. By 4 p.m. Becelaere and the ground north of it were in British possession.

The 29th Division (Major-General D. E. Cayley) sent forward the 86th and 87th Brigades (Br.-Generals G. R. H. Cheape and G. H. N. Jackson), keeping the 88th (Br.-General B. C. Freyberg) for exploitation. In their case an intermediate objective was selected about three thousand yards forward, where the battalions in second line would leap-frog those in the front line and secure the first objective. An intermediate line, including Hooge, was reached as early as 6.30 a.m. and the first objective between 8.30 and 8.45 a.m.; the 2/Royal Fusiliers (86th Brigade) then pushed on to Polderhoek and northwards, and the 1/K.O.S.B. (87th Brigade) to Tower Hamlets, almost to Gheluvelt, capturing a German battery, these objectives being reached about 9.40 a.m.

The 88th Brigade now came up and passed through the leading troops, and at 10.15 a.m. the 4/Worcestershire recaptured Gheluvelt, with many prisoners, and east of the village took a battery of heavy howitzers.[1] On nearing

[1] In the First Battle of Ypres, the 2/Worcestershire had, on 31st October, 1914, recaptured Gheluvelt, from which the line was subsequently withdrawn. See "1914" Vol. II, pp. 328–31.

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Kruiseecke a pause had to be made until 12.15 p.m., as the shells of the heavy artillery barrage were still falling on the village; after this the enemy, having been reinforced,[1] little further progress could be made, and the front line of the 29th Division, although well over the top of the Ypres Ridge, remained on the line: east of Broodseinde–Becelaere—short of Kruiseecke. After the capture of the first objective, both the 9th and 29th Divisions reported that the situation was favourable for cavalry; but it was not found possible to pass the French cavalry brigade, which the Second Army obtained, over the cratered areas before nightfall. The 36th Division (Major-General Clifford Coffin), the reserve of the II Corps, was moved from Vlamertinghe towards Ypres at 11 a.m. and at 2.45 p.m. was ordered to advance with a view to coming into line between the 9th and 29th Divisions and advancing against Terhand, a mile south-east of Becelaere, but owing to the terrible state of the roads it was 11 p.m. before the leading brigade (109th) was assembled near Bellewaarde Lake, and it did not move forward to get into position until 5 a.m. on the 29th.

The orders of the XIX Corps (Lieut.-General Sir H. E. Watts)[2] directed the 35th and 14th Divisions to carry out the attack to the first objective; but as the Comines canal, with an elbow bend and the strong position of the Bluff on its northern bank ran through the sector of the latter division, the centre of the attack was to make a pause on an intermediate line The Bluff—The Caterpillar—Mount Sorrel, whilst the outer flanks moved straight to the objective. The 35th Division would on receipt of corps orders push on to Zandvoorde; but the 14th Division would not go any farther than the first objective,[3] and the 41st Division, from reserve, if circumstances permitted, would be pushed up to the right of the 35th Division in its place.

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[1] By the *52nd Reserve Division* from the reserve.

[2] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. C. N. Macmullen; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. A. J. G. Moir; C.R.A., Br.-Gen. W. B. R. Sandys; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. F. A. Wynter; C.E., Br.-Gen. E. N. Stockley.

[3] The 14th Division had lost heavily in March 1918 and had been reduced to cadre; but in the middle of June had been sent back to England, where it was reconstituted with men of Category B, returning in July and going into the line of the Second Army on 29th August. Its units were weak, by the end of September the 43rd Brigade having a fighting strength of only 63 officers and 1,667 other ranks.

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The 35th Division (Major-General A. H. Marindin) put all three brigades in front line, from left to right, the 106th (Br.-General J. H. W. Pollard), the 104th (Br.-General J. W. Sandilands) and the 105th (Br.-General A. J. Turner). In spite of the darkness and rough ground, the attack started at 5.30 a.m. without a hitch, the enemy was apparently surprised and offered only slight resistance, and casualties were light. The 106th Brigade reached the first objective by 7.30 a.m. and the other two brigades, after a pause on the intermediate line at 6.30 a.m., joined it there at 8.2 and 8.30 a.m., respectively. At 9.50 a.m. the left and centre brigades resumed their progress, without much artillery support, as the state of the roads and tracks, and shell-fire and mines delayed the march of the batteries detailed. In spite of machine-gun fire from Shrewsbury Forest and point-blank fire from field guns—three of which were captured—Alaska House, 2 miles ahead, was taken by the 18/Highland L.I. (106th Brigade), though Ugly Wood, just beyond it, held out. Touch was then established with the 29th Division, whilst the 17/Lancashire Fusiliers (104th Brigade) went on and by 4 p.m. had reached the edge of the ruins of Zandvoorde, where the leading troops of the 105th Brigade came up on its right.

The 14th Division (Major-General P. C. B. Skinner) employed the 43rd and 42nd Brigades (Br.-Generals G. E. Pereira and H. T. Dobbin), keeping the 41st (Br.-General W. F. Sweny) in reserve. South of the canal the advance was to go straight through to the first objective; north of it a pause was to be made until 7.10 a.m. on the intermediate line. After the first objective had been taken there would be no regular barrage, but the infantry would try and gain ground and reach a second objective, less than a thousand yards ahead.

The Bluff, a mound which bristled with machine guns and was expected to prove troublesome to the 43rd Brigade, was taken by frontal and encircling attacks, delivered by the 12/Suffolk with such speed and skill that the enemy, who at first showed signs of offering resistance, quickly gave way. This success paved the way for the 20/Middlesex to reach the White Château, standing on higher ground whence a good view around could be obtained, without much opposition, and occupy the second objective, though the enemy held on to the Damm Strasse, an embankment lying to the south.

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The 42nd Brigade encountered considerable opposition, especially from the St. Eloi craters and defended localities and suffered throughout from artillery and machine-gun fire; but the first objective was reached by 6.20 a.m., and the second, short of the Damm Strasse, in due course. Patrols were pushed forward to the Damm Strasse but were later withdrawn, as during the afternoon the enemy shelled the new positions heavily, and his machine guns and snipers were active.

It remained to bring up the 41st, the reserve, division. In the early morning it had its head, the 124th Brigade (Br.-General R. L. Adlercron), near Swan Château, a little to the south of Ypres, and at 9.17 a.m. Major-General Lawford received orders by telephone from the XIX Corps to put into effect the agreed scheme. The leading brigade, passing through the first objective, was to move south-eastwards north of the Comines canal and make good a line running from the canal through Kortewilde towards Zandvoorde, which the 35th Division was to secure; a flank guard was to establish posts along the northern bank of the canal and remain until relieved by the following brigade; and the advance would be covered by its own divisional artillery, already in action.

The 124th Brigade advanced to the forming-up line, Hill 60–Mount Sorrel, and at 2 p.m., as the enemy was reported to be falling back, divisional orders were given for the brigade to push on and exploit the success. By 6.30 p.m., against considerable opposition from machine guns and snipers, the advanced guard reached the Kortewilde line, and by late evening a battalion of the 123rd Brigade (Br.-General M. Kemp-Welch) had taken over the guard of the canal with its other two battalions in and near Battle Wood. This remained the situation, as orders to press on to Houthem bridge over the canal could not be carried out that night. The total advance of the attacking left wing of the Second Army had varied from 4½ to 6 miles, and the new line was comfortably beyond the Ypres Ridge. The casualties had been light; the most serious had been in the R.A.F., which had lost 26 machines in low-flying attacks.

The orders to the right wing of the Second Army, the X Corps (Lieut.-General R. B. Stephens)[1] and the XV Corps

[1] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. C. Evans; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. W. K. Legge; C.R.A., Br.-Gen. W. P. Monkhouse; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. A. H. Ollivant; C.E., Br.-Gen. G. H. Boileau.

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(Lieut.-General Sir B. de Lisle),[1] were to the effect that they would form a flank guard to the advance of the left wing, watching their opportunity and taking every advantage of of the enemy weakening to press his retirement. Their heavy artillery was to carry out intense counter-battery work and shell selected localities. If all went well, three objectives were to be occupied in succession, but no advance was to be made beyond the first objective without divisional orders. The action of the infantry took the form of sending forward strong patrols under artillery barrages and machine-gun fire ; those of the X Corps started at zero hour, but those of the XV Corps not until 3 p.m. From Ploegsteert Wood (exclusive) in the south right up to the right of the XIX Corps the first objective was reached and in some cases over-passed.

In the 34th Division (Major-General C. L. Nicholson), on the left, the patrols of the 103rd Brigade (Br.-General R. I. Rawson), against long-range machine-gun fire from strongpoints near the Damm Strasse, managed to reach the first objective about 8.30 a.m. ; but then could make no progress. A barrage was arranged for 4.45 p.m., but before this came down the German fire had been subdued by the Lewis guns, and the troops pushed on and captured the strongpoints with the unfortunate result that their own barrage came down on them and the left retired to the line of the first objective; but the right pushed on so as to be in front of it.[2]

The patrols of the 101st Brigade (Br.-General W. J. Woodcock) also reached the first objective, but could go no farther.

The patrols of the 89th and 90th Brigades (Br.-Generals R. A. M. Currie and G. A. Stevens) of the 30th Division (Major-General W. de L. Williams) made headway at once and reached the first objective shortly before 7 a.m. At 3 p.m., by divisional orders, they made a short further advance against considerable opposition, and later the Germans were seen to be retiring from Messines Ridge.

[1] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. H. H. S. Knox ; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. G. R. Frith ; C.R.A., Br.-Gen. B. R. Kirwan ; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. C. W. Collingwood ; C.E., Br.-Gen. C. W. Singer.

[2] For initiation and gallantry in attacking strongpoints Sergt. L. McGuffie, 1/5th K.O.S.B., was awarded a posthumous V.C.

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Meantime the X Corps headquarters, hearing of the progress of the XIX Corps on the left, at 4.40 p.m. issued orders to the 34th and 30th Divisions for the capture before dark of the third objective. These orders did not reach the battalions of the 103rd Brigade until 6.30 p.m. and before preparations for attack were completed, the barrage, fired at 7 p.m., was over; so the advance did not take place. The 101st Brigade received the orders in sufficient time; but the attempt to climb the ridge and turn Wytschaete from the north and south failed, although the extreme left got within ten yards of the German posts in the second objective; in oncoming darkness a shell-pitted area proved a handicap to effecting more.

The attack, made about 6.30 p.m. by the brigades of the 30th Division, resulted in the gain of a little ground, one patrol actually entering Messines; there was no great opposition, but here also darkness and the broken nature of the ground hindered all further movement.

In the XV Corps, it was not until 11 a.m. that the 31st Division (Major-General J. Campbell) ordered the 92nd Brigade (Br.-General O. de L. Williams), with one battalion of the 93rd, to make an attack at 3 p.m. In spite of the enemy being in expectation of one and shelling the back areas and roads, particularly Hill 63, on the left the operation went well and the first objective was secured. The attempt on the right to clear Ploegsteert Wood from north to south, assisted by a diversion from the west, had little success, the troops who entered the wood being shelled out of it. In co-operation with the X Corps, the XV Corps headquarters also endeavoured to exploit the success of the XIX Corps. At 4.30 p.m. Lieut.-General de Lisle ordered the 31st Division to cross to the north of the Douve stream between the third objective and de la Croix Farm, and advance to the Comines canal, north-west of the town of Comines, with a view to cutting off the garrison of Messines Ridge, which the 30th Division (X Corps) was attacking in front at the same time—which we have seen it did at 6.30 p.m. The 93rd Brigade (less a battalion with the 92nd) with a brigade of field artillery, a field company R.E., a field ambulance, etc., was detailed to lead the operation assigned to the 31st Division, as the 94th (Yeomanry) Brigade, which had left Hazebrouck that morning was no farther forward than Bailleul and thus not available—it did not in fact arrive

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to support the 92nd Brigade until 7 a.m. on the 29th. Delays in transmission of orders, congestion of traffic on the roads and darkness prevented the assembly of the advanced guard of the 93rd Brigade at the starting point until 9 p.m. and of the main body until 10.30 p.m.; then the brigade, whilst on the eastern slopes of Hill 63, came under heavy and accurate shell-fire, and was forced to extend. After a halt of nearly an hour, the advance was continued for two miles without opposition until Ash Crater, near the first objective, was reached. Here touch was gained with the German rear guards and the brigade came under machine-gun fire. Progress was then slow, but ground was gained, as the Germans, after offering a little resistance and making good use of the earlier constructed pill-boxes, retired methodically from one point to another, the signal for each retirement being given by the firing of green lights. Confusion naturally arose in the dark, and at one time the leading battalion found German units marching about five hundred yards away on either flank. It was not until 5 a.m. on the 29th that the troops were again in hand and the advance stopped; a north–south line through Tilluel Farm, south of the Douve was then organized.

The Belgian-British attack to the north had caused the enemy to begin a retirement from the Wytschaete–Messines area, and the X and XV Corps had done their best to take advantage of the success of the II and XIX Corps.

NOTE I

The Belgians on the 28th September[1]

(Sketch 7)

The attack was made by 9 Belgian divisions, 7 of them in front line, on a frontage of 15,000 yards from the left of the British Second Army to Lake Blankaert, against Passchendaele Ridge and Houthulst Forest, with a subsidiary operation to clear the area about Woumen and Dixmude in

[1] From an account received from the Belgian Ministry of War and from F.O.A. vii (ii).

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order to cover the left flank. The preliminary bombardment of high-explosive and gas opened at 2.30 a.m., and at 5.30 a.m. the infantry advanced under a barrage fired by six hundred 75's. Between 10 and 11 a.m. four of the six German lines of defence were captured. After a pause of an hour the attack was resumed against much stiffer resistance. A general advance of about five miles was made. The right took Passchendaele, established itself alongside the Second Army east of Broodseinde,[1] and was just short of Westroosebeke, but did not reach Staden, the northern end of the Ypres Ridge. The centre captured the greater part of Houthulst Forest, from the north of which the line ran back to join the original front just south of Dixmude. The French troops remained in support.

NOTE II

THE GERMANS IN FLANDERS ON 28TH SEPTEMBER[2]

According to Crown Prince Rupprecht's diary (ii p. 450), the Chief of the Staff of the *Fourth Army*, at 6.30 p.m. on the 27th reported that "an attack on both sides of Houthulst "Forest was imminent". "Bavarian Regt. No. 28" (*12th Bavarian Division*, at the junction of the British and Belgians) states, "information that the enemy would "probably attack towards morning reached the regiment at "10.30 p.m. [27th]", but "relief and movement were in "full swing when at 2.30 a.m. [28th] the enemy's bombard-"ment opened heavily and prevented any co-ordinated "movement". "Bav. Res. Regt. No. 16" (*6th Bavarian Reserve Division*), which was about Wytschaete, claims that "the division was withdrawn during the night in order to "maintain a general line". "Regt. No. 22" (*11th Reserve Division*), admits being driven back to the Ploegsteert–Messines road, but adds that the general retirement during the night was due to penetration north of Wytschaete. Crown Prince Rupprecht records (ii, p. 452), "the worst is that "according to a report from the *Fourth Army*, the troops will "no longer stand up to a serious attack".

[1] The French situation map does not give Passchendaele to the Belgians; it is also inaccurate as regards the British.

[2] Their strength on the front of attack is given in a footnote on p. 64.

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CHAPTER VI

BATTLE OF YPRES 1918 (*concluded*)

THE SECOND ARMY

29TH SEPTEMBER – 3RD OCTOBER

(Sketches 7, 9)

The 28th September had resulted in considerable gain of ground by the Belgian Army and the British Second Army,[1] including the greater part of the Ypres Ridge and Houthulst Forest. On the 29th very nearly as much was won. Little resistance was offered south of Zandvoorde, the general result being a right wheel of the Second Army towards the Lys. The southern portion of the German *Fourth Army*, as General Plumer had foreseen, was evidently ready to retire to shorten its line; its commander, General Sixt von Armin, planned to hold the so-called Flanders Position I[2] from Bousbecque on the Lys, with a forward switch from Wervicq, northward to Gheluwe, Terhand, Moorslede Handzaeme and Ostend, with the left flank on the river.[3] Behind this lay Flanders Position II, defined by Menin on the Lys–Ledeghem–St. Pieter–de Ruiter (2 miles south-west of Roulers).

General Plumer's orders, issued at 7 p.m. on the 28th, directed a continuation of the operations. They will again be quoted in extenso, as they cannot well be shortened:

> " 1. The II Corps will maintain touch with the Belgians, " conform with its left to any movement the Belgian " right might make, and will advance [south-eastward] " to Terhand and Gheluwe, keeping a reserve in the " vicinity of Becelaere.

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[1] See Sketch 7.

[2] See Sketch 9.

[3] Rupprecht, ii, pp. 451–2, records that this was the case, and nothing remained but a gradual retirement behind the Schelde. He adds that preparations for the retirement of the *Sixth Army* (its boundary with the *Fourth Army* was immediately south of Armentières) were to be taken in hand. Reinforcements, including the *1st Bavarian Reserve Division*, were directed to the position. B.O.A., p. 561. The abandonment of Messines Ridge during the night of the 28th/29th was " painful " but unavoidable, as " the line of retreat of the troops on it was endangered ".

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" 2. The XIX Corps will (keeping touch with the II " Corps) move [south-eastwards] with its left on Ten- " brielen and subsequently, if the situation permits, to " Wervicq, and with its right will secure the crossings " over the Ypres–Comines canal and co-operate with the " X Corps in clearing the ground west of the canal.

" 3. The task of the X Corps will be to clear the " Wytschaete–Messines Ridge and the ground between " these places and the Ypres–Comines canal.

" 4. The XV Corps will move [north-eastwards] on " Warneton and Comines, securing the crossings over " the river Lys ".

After the Second Army order had been issued, General Plumer received another lengthy instruction from General Degoutte, timed 7.30 p.m.[1] After enumerating the successes of the day, it continued that the strongest resistance had been offered opposite to the northern and central Belgian groups, and seemed to weaken opposite the Belgian southern group and the British Second Army; it was on the latter part of the front that the operations must be developed, and the attack pursued without pause, even during the night. It was therefore directed that, whilst the rest continued pressure, " the Belgian southern group and the British army will attack *à fond* " to-night eastward and south-eastward, " the Belgian army against Moorslede, the British against " Becelaere and Kruiseecke,[2] at the same time pushing " forward on the whole front as far as the Lys. It is by the " rupture of the enemy's front in this sector of least resistance " that there is the best chance of passing the cavalry through."

Instructions for the French Cavalry Corps, with Thielt (25 miles from the Yser) as its destination, followed; but as the cavalry did not appear, need not be quoted. The French VII Corps was to be ready to support the Belgian southern group and the British Second Army, one division being ordered to Langemarck and the other to St. Julien (2½ miles south of Langemarck). This corps, likewise, did not come into action.

[1] Printed in F.O.A. vii (ii), Annexe 41.

[2] Becelaere had already been taken by the 9th Division, and, although the ruins of Kruiseecke were not occupied, the 29th Division was actually on the knoll on which the village stood. The orders of a Group of Armies should not enter into details.

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After consideration of this Instruction General Plumer saw no reason to modify the orders he had already given.

After a night of torrential rain—it was followed by a misty morning and a short, sunny afternoon ending in more rain—the troops had difficulty in reaching their jumping-off places over the devastated ground, and many brigades made a late start. The amount of artillery support provided was small, it being impossible to get the heavy guns forward quickly owing to the terrible state of the roads and tracks (mostly marked for light traffic only); even the field artillery advanced with difficulty.

The operations which ensued divide themselves conveniently into two parts, east and west of the Comines canal.

In the II Corps the movement was eastward; the 29th Division, on the right, was to capture Gheluwe; the 36th, Terhand; the 9th, covering the latter's left and keeping touch with the Belgians, was to move on Keiberg.

The 29th Division detailed the 88th Brigade to lead against Gheluwe, with the 87th and 86th echeloned to the right and left rear. It was not until 7 a.m. that, in the morning mist, the divisional artillery opened a barrage and an advance was made, the leading troops coming almost at once under severe frontal and enfilade fire from machine guns and field guns at very close range.[1] By 9.15 a.m. progress of about a mile had been made; but after this the 88th Brigade was checked for the day short of Koelenberg, as were also the 87th and 86th, the former having to form a defensive right flank to guard against counter-attack. The field artillery could give no great help, being itself persistently shelled; but the long-range guns equally persistently bombarded the Menin Road behind the enemy.

The 36th Division, waiting for its reserve brigade, the 109th to take the lead, did not begin the attack until 9 a.m. and then without artillery support. The other brigades followed, progress was slow, the more so as hedges and numerous buildings offered the enemy cover; but towards 4 p.m. Terhand was reached and Flanders Position I overrun, the defenders making no serious stand, as the 9th Division and

[1] Prisoners said that fresh troops had been inserted in the Kruiseecke sector, which was held by the *40th Division*.

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the Belgians had already broken through on the left. Later Dadizeele and Vijfwegen, beyond Terhand and just in front of the Flanders Position II were occupied. Touch was obtained on the left with the 9th Division, but not on the right with the 29th, so a flank was formed from Vijfwegen back to Terhand.

The 9th Division advanced in the same formation as the 29th and, by agreement with the Belgian 8th Division, at the same hour, 9 a.m., as the 36th. The 28th Brigade, from reserve, led, with the 27th and 26th echeloned to the right and left in rear of it. No creeping barrage was arranged, but smoke shells were fired to cover the troops whilst crossing the shallow valley which separates the Keiberg knoll from the main Ypres Ridge. Amidst desultory enemy shelling and considerable machine-gun fire the 9/Scottish Rifles, the Royal Newfoundland Battalion, and the leading troops of the Belgian 8th Division pressed forward, and by 10 a.m. had taken Keiberg, and by 1 p.m. were facing Flanders Position I. As Terhand on the right had not yet been captured many casualties were suffered. The Belgians, encountering stiff resistance in front of Moorslede, called for help. Major-General Tudor, who was at Broodseinde, sent them the 26th Brigade (less a battalion) and Br.-General Croft, seeing the 28th Brigade checked, brought up the 27th Brigade. Thus reinforced, the whole line advanced, and at 2.30 p.m. broke through the Flanders Position I, in spite of its strong wire, on a front of nearly four thousand yards. The three brigades did not halt and soon after 4 p.m., established themselves near the Menin–Roulers road in front of Flanders Position II. They made contact later on the right with the 36th Division in Dadizeele, and turned back the left flank to join the Belgian right, which had taken Moorslede, but had not advanced quite so far as the British left.

To the south of the II Corps, the 35th Division of the XIX Corps sent forward the 105th Brigade through the left of the 104th, supported by the 106th on the left, to capture Zandvoorde. Patrols during the night had found no enemy there; but as dawn broke the hostile artillery became very active, and it seemed that the Germans had reoccupied the ruins of the village. When, at 8 a.m., the 105th Brigade advanced in the mist from Klein Zillebeke, two miles to the west of Zandvoorde, it went astray south-westwards towards Hollebeke, and, instead of attacking Zandvoorde from the

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north-west, eventually did so from the west and was received by heavy fire from machine guns in the ruins of the outskirts. An attack at 12.15 p.m. failed with considerable losses, being made under a barrage fired by only two 18-pdr. batteries of the 157th Brigade R.F.A. of the divisional artillery, following a fifteen-minute bombardment.

Major-General Marindin was still without news of the 105th Brigade when at 1 p.m. he telephoned to Br.-General Pollard (106th Brigade) instructing him that if the 105th Brigade was held up, he was to take command of all advanced troops and must push on through the 105th to Tenbrielen and Blegnaert Farm. He then went forward himself to Klein Zillebeke. Br.-General Pollard, on arriving at 105th Brigade headquarters, a thousand yards west of Zandvoorde, at 2 p.m., found that another attack from the south and north-west had been arranged for 3 p.m. He ordered a battalion of his own brigade to join in on the left, and the other two to support it. Progress under very heavy fire and shelling was slow, and at 5 p.m. he put in his support battalions. After an attempted counter-attack the enemy broke and retired, and the 106th Brigade by nightfall reached a line about five hundred yards from Tenbrielen, with patrols pushed forward to that village and to Blegnaert Farm.

In the 41st Division the 124th Brigade had been directed to secure and hold all crossings over the Comines canal down to the southern end of Houthem, and form a line from the canal to the west of Tenbrielen. This it had done by 8.30 a.m. dealing successfully with isolated snipers and machine guns, and then clearing Houthem. The 123rd Brigade, which had left Battle Wood, at the elbow of the canal, at 4 a.m., then passed through according to plan. It was able to advance rapidly, and the enemy being surprised, the 10/R. West Kent captured a battery of howitzers whose detachments were breakfasting; and a party of the 23/Middlesex, on being fired on from the west bank of the canal, crossed it and returned with 35 prisoners. When the battalions reached the Comines–Menin railway the enemy could be seen fleeing from Comines on the roads west of the town in motor cars and lorries. Both flanks of the 123rd Brigade were, however, unprotected. Casualties had thus far been slight, but they now became heavy; so, under the triple threat of envelopment, of a wedge being driven between the two battalions, and of attack by enemy posts left and rear, the two battalions

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fell back three-quarters of a mile to the Gladjebeek. There the right was secured by the arrival of troops of the 30th Division; but the left had to be swung back, it being late before contact was established with the 122nd Brigade, which had fought its way from Kortewilde to Villers Farm and was in touch with the 35th Division. Thus east of the Comines canal the left, that is the 9th and 36th Divisions, had made good progress, but on the right the 29th and 35th Divisions, being without much artillery support, were held up by fresh troops, the former near Kruiseecke and the latter temporarily at Zandvoorde, whilst the 41st, after a good advance, was forced to retire somewhat because it found itself isolated.

The better part of a day had been wasted over Zandvoorde; but as it was too dark to continue operations, it was decided that the 35th Division should—as originally suggested in Army orders—attack Wervicq, at 5.50 a.m. next morning, and arrangements were made by the XIX Corps for artillery support and for the 41st Division, on the right, to attack Comines at the same time.

West of the canal all that was asked for was accomplished, and the area up to the Warneton–Comines railway cleared; but the operations were somewhat complicated as the 14th and 34th Divisions faced south-east, and the 30th and 31st Divisions north-east, and a column of the 93rd Brigade, in the endeavour to cut off the Germans retreating from Messines had by dawn penetrated across the front of its division and got as far as Tilleul Farm, south of the Douve and had later continued on north-east to the Warneton–Ypres road.

The task assigned to the 14th Division was to secure the passages of the Comines canal and co-operate with the 34th Division (X Corps) in clearing the ground west of the canal. At 5.30 a.m. the advanced guards of the 43rd and 42nd Brigades started, intending to swing eastward. The enemy seemed to have disappeared, and the two brigades of the 14th Division, after advancing about a thousand yards, halted for a time on the line Denis Wood–Hollebeke–Lock No. 5 to avoid collision in the mist with their neighbours, whose troops were already masking their front. There they remained until, the 34th Division having passed in front of them, they found themselves in second line. At

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the close of the day both the 14th and 34th Divisions, crowded out, were withdrawn into reserve, and the former was transferred to the XV Corps.

The orders of the X Corps had been for its two divisions, each with its own artillery, to move eastward. The 34th Division was to direct its right on Lock 4, only about twelve hundred yards from Lock 5, and the 30th Division, keeping touch with the 31st Division (XV Corps) on its right, was to clear the Wytschaete–Messines ridge, and then move with its right on les Quatre Rois Cabaret and the southern edge of Houthem (on the canal between Locks 3 and 4).

The 103rd and 101st Brigades of the 34th Division moved eastward at 5.30 a.m. and, encountering little opposition, entered Wytschaete, passed over the second and third objectives of the previous day, and after inflicting heavy losses on the retiring enemy,[1] by 8.40 a.m. were abreast of Oosttaverne, some two thousand yards or more from the start. Passing across the front of the 14th Division, progress to the canal was continued uninterruptedly and it was reached about 1 p.m. At 12.25 p.m. the X Corps had sent orders to Major-General Nicholson that when the country west of the canal had been cleared and touch obtained with the 41st Division, which happened soon after, his brigades should be withdrawn, as the 30th Division to the south was taking over his front. This was duly carried out in the evening and the division, as already mentioned, became the corps reserve.

The 89th and 90th Brigades of the 30th Division started early, making for the Comines canal; the former, which lay in a re-entrant, moved at 3.40 a.m., in order to get abreast of the 90th for which zero hour was 5.30 a.m. Information came back slowly, the ground mist making observation difficult, but soon after 7 a.m. it was certain that men of the 90th Brigade were in Messines, confirmation being provided by the Germans who began soon to shell the village, and that the 89th was east of the Messines–Wytschaete road. The progress north-eastward of both brigades was then rapid, as opposition was slight. The 31st Division (XV Corps), on their right, had not been able to get on so fast; so at 10.10 a.m. Lieut.-General Stephens ordered the 30th Division to divert its right (90th Brigade) southwards, to move along

[1] The *6th Bavarian Reserve Division* retired from Messines to the line Comines—Tenbrielen.

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the Douve, instead of making for Houthem, a wide change of direction, and to bring up its reserve brigade if necessary, with the object of gaining the Warneton–Comines railway originally assigned as objective to the XV Corps. At 11.5 a.m. the 30th Division despatched the necessary orders to the brigades: the 90th and 89th Brigades would now hold the Comines canal from its junction with the Lys northwards to Lock 4, the former protecting its own right flank; the 21st Brigade would come up and be prepared to take over the front and these bridges, and the divisional artillery would move to positions west of the Messines–Wytschaete road and arrange that its right group should cover the flank from Warneton to Comines. To issue orders is one thing, to get them to units moving forward in open fighting is another. The orders did not reach the leading troops, which continued on to the canal; the rearward portions of battalions in some cases complied with them. Thus some considerable intermingling of units occurred, and at noon, the arrival of the 93rd Brigade (31st Division) near les Quatre Rois Cabaret, moving on Houthem athwart the advance of the 89th and 90th Brigades, added to the confusion.

The X Corps supplementary orders were not the only ones of that nature issued on this day. To satisfy the importunity of General Degoutte that it should be made clear the task of the Second Army was not to push eastwards, but to act as flank guard along the Lys, leaving the decisive action to the Belgians and French under the command of King Albert, at 12.30 p.m. General Plumer had to issue a formal order to that effect. It did not reach corps headquarters until between 2.30 and 3 p.m. and directed all corps of the Second Army, except the centre and left of the II Corps, to cover the crossings of the Lys from Armentières down to Menin: the XV Corps was made responsible for those south of Warneton (inclusive), the X Corps for the stretch between Warneton and Comines (both exclusive), the XIX, for Comines and Wervicq, and the right of the II Corps, for Menin.

The situation precluded the two left corps from attempting to act on this order; but at 2.45 p.m. the X Corps sent a warning order to the 30th Division that it was to hold the line of the Warneton–Comines railway for the night, from Warneton to the bridge over the Kortekeer, with posts in advance, covered by artillery detailed by the corps and to secure touch with the 31st Division on the right and the

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41st Division on the left. At 4.30 p.m. this order was transmitted to the brigades : the 90th Brigade was to occupy the divisional front, and the 89th, after the Comines canal was reached and its front had been covered by the 41st Division, was to join the 21st in reserve. As the two leading battalions of the 90th were well on their way to the canal, Br.-General Stevens detailed his reserve battalion to hold the new front facing the Lys with piquets and a line of resistance, a task which it could not complete until 2.30 a.m. (30th) ; the two battalions on the canal became support and reserve. All the troops of the 89th Brigade could not at once be withdrawn into reserve as the right of the 41st Division turned out to be not on the Warneton–Comines railway, but at Lock 3 ; a battalion of the 90th had therefore to be used along the canal to fill the space to the lock. Thus at night the line of the 30th Division ran from Warneton (exclusive) along the railway to the canal, and thence to Lock 3.

On the morning of the 29th the 93rd Brigade (less a battalion) of the 31st Division was south of the 30th Division on the Warneton–Ypres road at les Quatre Rois Cabaret, and the 94th was marching to support it, with its head at 10.30 a.m. two thousand yards in rear, at Tilleul Farm ; the 92nd (plus a battalion of the 93rd) held a line through the western part of Ploegsteert Wood. During the morning the 92nd pushed through the wood, noticing that the German pill-boxes and nests had hardly been touched by gun fire. Meeting with no opposition,[1] one battalion pushed on and occupied a line just north of the Warnave, coming there under considerable fire. Late at night another battalion continued the line past the eastern side of Ploegsteert Wood to Ultimo Crater in order to obtain contact with the 94th Brigade.

Meantime, General Plumer's 12.30 p.m. order had filtered down to the 31st Division : it had to occupy the line of the Lys so that its left flank rested on Warneton, and for this purpose to divert the 93rd Brigade, already worn out by its difficult night march. It was judged on the spot that by the time orders reached battalions it would be too late in the afternoon to move ; so the advance to the Lys was

[1] The *11th Reserve Division* had retired during the night to a position covering Warneton. " The withdrawal was not sufficient. The regiment " at first left weak detachments at Warneton, but was compelled to with- " draw them to the eastern bank ". " Regt. No. 22 ".

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postponed till next day. A line was occupied for the night by the 94th and 93rd Brigades from Ultimo Crater, in touch with the 92nd, to the south-east of les Quatre Rois Cabaret, behind the right of the 30th Division. The 31st Division was thus spread out on a 4-mile front from Ploegsteert to the Warneton–Ypres road.

The 40th Division, on the right of the Second Army front, had only a screen of enemy troops in front of it, and, after crossing the Warnave, by evening had established a line along the Lys from the Army boundary at Pont de Nieppe to Clé de Holland, and thence to the right of the 31st Division.

In spite of the fine success on the left, the ground gained elsewhere and the prisoners taken, the day had been somewhat disappointing. For the Germans were on the run, yet owing to the inexperience of the staffs in open warfare, to the weather preventing the R.A.F. from giving the usual assistance, and to the difficulties of the war-worn ground, less was accomplished than might have been, and the respite accorded to the enemy gave time for the leading troops of at least four fresh German divisions to be brought on to the field.[1]

General Plumer's orders for the 30th were issued at 7 p.m. on the 29th. They emphasized that the Second Army was still to act as flank guard to the Belgian Army and cover the Lys down to Harlebeke (3 miles below Courtrai), and he only slightly altered the sectors allotted to the corps by the 12.30 p.m. order, shifting them a little down river. The left of the XV Corps was extended from Warneton to Comines (exclusive); the X, from Comines to Menin (exclusive); the XIX, from Menin to Bisseghem (exclusive), 5 miles below Menin; and the II, down to Harlebeke. The new sectors were to be occupied with the least possible delay.

General Degoutte's Instructions (untimed)[2] were written in anticipation of a greater success being achieved on the 29th than was the case: "the results already obtained", it said, "are to be exploited as quickly and as energetically "as possible". A "groupement d'exploitation", under General Massenet, commanding the French VII Corps, who was to take over at midnight on the 29th/30th, was to

[1] See Note II at end of Chapter.
[2] Printed as Annexe 60 in F.O.A. vii (ii)

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be formed to act in the direction of Ghent,[1] via Roulers and Thielt, between fixed limits on north and south. This groupement would consist of the two centre Belgian divisions, the three divisions of the French VII Corps, the French divisional heavy artillery (previously lent to the Belgian Army); the Cavalry Corps was to act in close liaison with Massenet's Force; the Belgian right wing was to extend northwards the flank already provided by the British Army; and the Belgian left wing and the two divisions in the coastal area were to keep up pressure on the enemy. Unfortunately, as will be seen, General Degoutte overlooked any administrative arrangements for the "groupement d'exploitation", issuing no directions with regard to them.

A confirmatory message from General Degoutte explained that the tasks allotted to the British Second and Belgian Armies remained unchanged, except as modified by the formation of Massenet's Force, and required that a hot pursuit should be continued night and day, whatever the fatigue of the troops.

The ground ahead was flat with only a few isolated small rises, and, not having been fought over, was under cultivation, with villages, farms, woods and hedges untouched; air reconnaissance, so desirable in such terrain, was, owing to bad weather, very nearly out of the question.

Heavy rain fell on the night of the 29th/30th and throughout the 30th and this, with the scarcity of practicable roads, served to dislocate traffic behind the Allied forces, making the transport of ammunition and rations well-nigh impossible, an unhappy predicament for already tired troops. Prisoners stated that the Germans had fallen back behind the Lys[2] and during the day both Warneton and Comines were found evacuated. But even on this front some enemy troops put up a good fight in retreat, and on the main front opposite the British II Corps, the Belgians and the French, it was evident, from the severity of the artillery and machine-gun fire, that the Germans, heavily reinforced by six fresh divisions, had recovered from the effects of the first blow and intended to dispute further advance eastwards. General Massenet's Force did not pass through and only small advances were made during the day by the Allies, the British,

[1] See Sketches 1 and 7.

[2] See Sketch 9.

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in particular, being stopped before Gheluwe and near Vijfwegen, the sectors to which enemy reinforcements had been directed.[1]

Preparations were made in the corps of the Second Army to carry out the order to shift their sectors farther down the Lys; but the situation and the weather did not permit of the moves being carried out. On the right, the left of the 40th Division made a short advance between the Lys and the Warnave, the Fifth Army, immediately to the south, also gaining a little ground.

In the 31st Division, the 92nd Brigade, starting at 6.15 a.m. from around Ploegsteert Wood, had little difficulty except on the left in covering the short distance to the line of the Warnave and the Lys down to la Basse Ville (exclusive). The 94th Brigade, starting at 4 a.m., came up to the Ploegsteert—la Basse Ville road in support behind the left of the 92nd; in trying, at 6 a.m., to traverse the mile separating it from la Basse Ville–Warneton, it met with no opposition till it reached the ridge overlooking the Lys; here it was brought to a halt by machine-gun fire; but at 5.30 p.m. enemy fire decreased, and the advance was resumed and the river reached. Patrols of the London Scottish (90th Brigade, 30th Division) had shortly before entered Warneton and found it unoccupied. The 31st Division, covered by its own artillery, then held the line from Ploegsteert to Warneton with two brigades, which were ordered to thin out to one battalion each in front line.

In the X Corps, the 30th Division, with the 90th Brigade aligned along the Warneton–Comines railway, did not move; the whole of its sector was under fire from the south side of the Lys; but, as just mentioned, when fire slackened in the afternoon patrols pushed into Warneton. The 34th Division remained in reserve all day.

The 41st and 35th Divisions had orders from Lieut.-General Watts to advance at 5.50 a.m. and establish themselves on the Comines–Wervicq railway, which was straight ahead, a mile and a half to two miles away, whilst every available gun of the heavy artillery—in the event bad roads prevented any coming up—was to bombard both that part of Comines north of the Lys and Wervicq from 5.50 a.m.

[1] See Note II at end of Chapter.

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to 6.50 a.m. The 124th Brigade, in the lead of the 41st Division, advancing with field-gun support, met with practically no opposition, and before midday reached its appointed line and began consolidation. Patrols which entered Comines found it evacuated, and captured large quantities of stores.

The 105th and 106th Brigades of the 35th Division, under Br.-General Pollard, should also have moved off at 5.50 a.m. to reach Wervicq, as settled on the previous afternoon, and the bombardment was fired at that hour. Owing to the bad weather, the infantry was not ready until 6.15 a.m. and the bombardment had to be prolonged. All went well till the outskirts of Wervicq were approached, and some of the attacking infantry had actually got through the wire and into the trenches of the Gheluwe Switch; fire was then opened on them from the houses and considerable losses were suffered. In consequence a line was occupied along a light railway, about three hundred yards north of the main line, with the left thrown back. An attempt to advance, made in the afternoon, covered by such artillery as was available, was unsuccessful, and, for the night, the line remained where it was.

An advance made at 12.30 p.m. by the third brigade, the 104th, from Zandvoorde got no farther than America Cabaret, on the Becelaere–Wervicq road two miles from Wervicq, where it was stopped by machine-gun fire from south and east. The hopes that the 35th Division might extend its left along the railway another three miles as far as Coucou were completely dashed.

The II Corps achieved hardly better progress. The objective given to it was the course of the Lys from Menin to Harlebeke. At dawn patrols of the 29th Division, having discovered that the enemy was withdrawing—to the Flanders Position I—the 88th Brigade resumed its advance in heavy rain, with a battalion of the 87th and 86th Brigades on either flank. Little opposition was encountered until the slope down towards Gheluwe was reached, when all three brigades were brought to a standstill by fire from the Flanders Position, and only a little more ground was gained on the left in the course of the afternoon.

The 108th and 109th Brigades (Br.-Generals E. Vaughan and W. F. Hessey) of the 36th Division—whose front was extended northwards to Richmond Cross Roads—advancing

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at 5.30 a.m. assisted by a field artillery barrage, had no trouble with the Flanders Position I, being already beyond it; but they had severe fighting around the farms and copses near Artoishoek between Flanders Positions I and II, and at Vijwegen. Hill 41, east of the latter, was lost by counter-attack after being taken by the 12/R. Irish Rifles at the point of the bayonet. But northward of the hill an advance of about a thousand yards was achieved.

As the Belgian division on the left and to the rear of the 9th Division did not attack, the 9th Division itself did not move during the 30th, Major-General Tudor reporting to the II Corps that nothing but a simultaneous attack along the whole front, supported by a field artillery barrage, could succeed. By the end of the day the field artillery of all three divisions of the II Corps was in action covering the front line; but of the heavy guns only two 6-inch howitzer batteries behind Broodseinde, two sections of 6-inch guns about 1¾ miles east of Ypres, and one 9·2-inch howitzer a similar distance north-east of the town were in action. Hostile artillery fire was slight.[1]

General Degoutte issued no fresh instructions on this day, and the only order of the Second Army was an addendum to those of the 29th and referred to the artillery, whose future policy was to be directed to preventing the enemy from crossing the Lys and to carrying out counter-battery work and harassing fire; and for these purposes it was to be disposed in depth.

On the 1st and 2nd October very little progress was made by the Allies. The enemy had fallen back behind the Lys above Wervicq, harassed by the fire of the heavy artillery of the XV Corps on the roads through Armentières, Frelinghien, Deulemont and Warneton, and on the night of the 1st/2nd he evacuated Armentières and Erquinghem, the next passage above the former town, and had also begun an extensive withdrawal on the 17-mile front from Armentières southwards to Lens, in front of the Fifth Army;

[1] Both B.O.A., p. 562, and several regimental histories (*e.g.* "Regt. "No. 132" of the *39th Division*) assert that tanks were used against the Flanders Position, but no tanks were present.

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but he evidently intended to hold fast to what remained of Flanders Position I and to Flanders II, which he reinforced by at least two more divisions.[1]

The weather conditions improved on the 1st October, and the R.A.F. was able to harass the retreating Germans with low-flying attacks, easily dealing with the opposing air forces, destroying ten aeroplanes, and dropping 24 tons of bombs. The heavy guns of the XV Corps continued harassing fire, and were reinforced by the 9·2-inch guns of the X Corps, which shelled Bousbecque and beyond, whilst those of the II Corps fired on Menin and Wevelghem on the Lys, and on Moorslede (east of Hill 41). Bad road conditions, however, still continued; in the Second Army, notwithstanding, more artillery was brought forward, and supply did not fail, although it was found necessary to send back two brigades of the 14th Division to work on the roads.

Redistribution of the Lys front continued, the 30th Division relieving the 41st Division on its left. The 122nd and 123rd Brigades of the 41st, which had been in support and reserve, marched east on the 1st October via Tenbrielen with Menin as objective; but as soon as the morning mist lifted they were seen by the Germans from the hills south of the Lys, which commanded an extensive view over the ground to the north, and were heavily shelled and checked by fire from in front, and in flank from Wervicq. Towards 1 p.m. orders were received from the XIX Corps for the two brigades to break through the Gheluwe Switch south of Gheluwe; the 104th Brigade of the 35th Division on the right was already attacking, but could not progress. The 122nd Brigade received the orders too late for action upon them, and the 123rd managed only to reach the jumping-off line just before dark. Both brigades, therefore dug in about half a mile short of the German line.

To the north, the 29th Division, owing to strong opposition from the Gheluwe Switch, could make no progress. The 108th Brigade of the 36th Division, in vain made desperate endeavours to secure Hill 41; it suffered severe casualties and managed to make only a small advance. The 9th Division, under a smoke barrage which hid it from the

[1] See Note II at end of Chapter. The original five (and part of a sixth) opposite the Second Army had therefore been reinforced by five more; and the three (and the greater part of a fourth) opposite the Belgians by three more.

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Germans so that the bombardment fell behind it, and well supported by field guns pushed up to within four or five hundred yards of the front line, broke through the German position and then advanced rapidly to the railway beyond. Ledeghem was taken by the 27th Brigade ; but as no support was forthcoming on the right and left of the division, the village could not be held.

On the extreme right of the Second Army, Bizet, north of Armentières, was secured by the 40th Division by encirclement.

At 4.30 p.m. General Degoutte issued orders for a night attack to break through the German position ; but they were ignored[1] by the British.

The Second Army orders for the 2nd October, after providing for the holding of the line of the Lys down to Wervicq by the XV and X Corps, directed the XIX Corps, with the support of the 34th Division from the reserve of the X Corps if necessary, " to clear up the situation towards Menin " and move eastward on the right of the II Corps, and for the II Corps to " clear the ground south of Ledeghem ", and then resume the march eastward.

The 40th and 31st Divisions of the XV Corps on the 2nd October carried out almost unopposed advances on either side of Armentières, having orders not to enter the ruins of the town which had only just been evacuated and might contain traps. They then made preparation for bridging the Lys. The 30th Division, with a long line to hold from Warneton to Comines, did no more than push into the portion of Comines north of the Lys. The attack of the 35th, 41st and 29th Divisions eastward, with good barrage support, encountered stout resistance, but caused the enemy to evacuate part of the Gheluwe Switch south of the village ; his field artillery fire continued to be heavy, and in the evening he counter-attacked and deprived the 41st Division of part of its gains. The 35th Division made little progress, and the 29th Division none except to secure a small corner of Gheluwe. In the Hill 41 area, the 107th and 109th Brigades of the 36th Division made gallant efforts, but

[1] See Note I at end of Chapter.

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against very heavy machine-gun fire could gain no ground. The 9th Division did not move on this day, as the night attack of the Belgian centre, under General Massenet, failed and the divisions next to the British could not advance.[1]

On the evening of the 30th September, Br.-General F. W. L. S. H. Cavendish, the British liaison officer at General Degoutte's headquarters, had reported that practically no advance had been made during the day on the Franco-Belgian front. This he attributed to the violent rain during the last twenty-four hours and to the complete chaos on the roads; owing to this latter factor, General Massenet's Force had not launched its attack in the morning at zero hour, and the cavalry had not come up: the French 128th Division had received neither rations nor ammunition since the night of the 28th/29th: the French staffs were ignorant of the conditions prevailing on this part of the front and, though warned, had taken no steps to control traffic, police the roads or provide for their upkeep during the advance: it was General Degoutte's opinion that beyond machine guns there was practically no serious force facing the Franco-Belgian front: the view taken by the Belgians was that they were in contact with the German Flanders Position, that the Germans had despatched all their available reserves to this position, and, supported by plenty of artillery and machine guns, intended to make a supreme effort; for on holding the position depended their retention of the Flanders coast.[2]

At 6 p.m. on the 1st October messages were received at Second Army headquarters to the effect that the forward Belgian and French divisions had exhausted their food supplies and that delays would occur in forwarding anything by road: Belgian aviation headquarters would attempt to deliver 15,000 rations by air on the 2nd. Two British

[1] For the orders to and the complete failure of Massenet's Force, see Note I at end of Chapter.

[2] The state of the roads is confirmed by the Belgian account of 30th September: "the rain which had not ceased to fall had rendered precarious "the repair of the roads; the supply of rations and munitions, and even "the evacuation of the wounded had become horribly difficult. Grave "delays occurred in the movement of batteries. The approach roads were "littered with motors, lorries and vehicles of all kinds, stuck fast in ruts, "overturned in ditches, or blocked for hours at a time. The attack could "only be supported by a reduced amount of artillery".

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squadrons were placed at the disposal of the Belgian air force to help in this work.[1] During the night, rations were transported to the various aerodromes, and in four hours on the 2nd October, 15,000 rations, weighing about 13 tons in all, were dropped by eighty aeroplanes without mishap.

During the afternoon of the 2nd General Degoutte, nevertheless, " gave orders to the British and Belgian armies " to continue their pressure " ;[2] the British Second Army would try to gain the river Lys at Menin and Courtrai, the Belgian southern group supporting it ; the main effort would be made by the centre group of the Belgian Army, which should seek to break the German front between Roulers and Zarren towards Thielt.[3]

It was clear, however, that no attack could succeed against the German defences until the Allied heavy artillery was in position and full preparations had been made. At 7.45 p.m. General Plumer, after consultation with British G.H.Q., issued an order which, as far as the British were concerned, brought the battle to an end. It began :

" (1) The attack carried out on the Army front to-day " made little progress owing to the determined resist- " ance offered by the enemy, both with artillery and " machine-gun fire.

" (2) Corps will consolidate the ground they now " hold and no further attacks will be made until further " orders.

" (3) Every effort will be made to improve com- " munications and push forward artillery as rapidly " as possible ".

Reorganization was taken in hand and it was hoped to resume operations on the 7th. General Degoutte, however, decided late in the evening to renew the attack towards Hooglede at 3 a.m. (3rd) with the French 128th and 164th Divisions, aided by two companies of tanks, as the French XXX. Corps of three divisions was on its way, and Maréchal Foch had placed the French XXXIV Corps of three divisions, then at St. Omer in his general reserve, at

[1] See " War in the Air ", VI, p. 534.

[2] These are the words of F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 125, and it gives a reference to General Degoutte's Instruction No. 3914, 2nd Oct. 1918, but does not print this Instruction as it does the others.

[3] For these places see Sketch 7.

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the disposal of the Flanders Group to relieve the tired Belgians. This early morning attack met with some success, the 164th Division advancing nearly two miles; orders were therefore given to continue the operation on the 4th, when it was a failure.

On the evening of that day General Degoutte issued instructions for another general advance, leaving the date open, but all preparations were to be completed by the night of the 7th/8th.

On the 5th both the Belgian and British commanders made it clear that their troops would not be ready by that date; King Albert was impressed by the losses which the Belgians had suffered,[1] and wished to await the arrival of the French XXX Corps. This formation, however, could not concentrate the artillery and infantry of its two leading divisions before the 13th at the earliest. Maréchal Foch was much displeased at the delay, but after explanation agreed to a postponement, although not such a long one; because, first, the British and American offensives were in full swing—the British Fourth Army had attacked the Beaurevoir Line on the 3rd and the second phase of the American Argonne offensive had been begun on the 4th; secondly, the German withdrawal, particularly opposite the British Fifth Army in the Lille area, would, in a very short time, provide the enemy with fresh reserves; and, thirdly, extra artillery would be available on the 8th, and one division of the XXX Corps on the 9th. He, therefore, wished the attack to take place on the 10th. After some further discussion, King Albert fixed the 14th as the date.

NOTE I

The Belgians 29th September–3rd October

(Sketches 7, 9)

On the 29th the Belgian Army resumed the attack at 6 a.m. after a short bombardment. The object was the capture of Flanders Position I. The original four German divisions having

[1] Between 28th September and 3rd October the Belgian Army had lost 2,000 killed and 10,000 sick and wounded, the total net loss being 4,500, including 50 per cent. of the officers. In the same period the casualties of the British Second Army had been 303 officers and 4,392 other ranks; it had captured 4,672 prisoners and about a hundred guns. The total captures of the Flanders Group had been about 10,000 prisoners, 300 guns, 00 trench mortars and 600 machine guns.

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been reinforced the resistance was stubborn, and the northern end of the Ypres Ridge, Westroosebeke–Staden, was not captured. The right, however, not only took Moorslede and reached a point in the position beyond, but was only just short of De Ruiter (2 miles south-west of Roulers), also in it. North of this progress was less, the front sloped back to Westroosebeke, which was not taken,[1] whence again the line formed a flank back to the north of Dixmude, with a large bulge beyond Clercken. Dixmude itself, the symbol to the Belgians which Ypres was to the British, was taken by a wide turning movement from the south and the rear.

The French contingent was not engaged.

On the 30th an advance was made in the centre of nearly two miles, and the last portion of the Ypres Ridge, including Westroosebeke and Staden, captured. French troops came into the line, the 128th Division relieving the Belgian 3rd after it had taken Staden, and later the 164th Division came up between it and the Belgian 9th, on its right.

Weather and road conditions prevented serious operations on the 1st October, the Franco-Belgian troops were up against the Flanders Position and hardly any advance was made. At 4.30 p.m. General Degoutte ordered them "to break as quickly "as possible by a night attack the resistance of the line Courtrai–"north of Dixmude. But a decision should particularly be "sought by the centre of the Belgian Army (Massenet's Force) "which will move against Roulers–Hooglede, whilst the Belgian "right and the British Second Army will push on against the "Lys and Courtrai"[2].

"Launched at 4 a.m. on the 2nd October the [night] attack "gave no result whatever. . . . The units of the French 164th "and 128th Divisions which succeeded in leaving the starting "line could not retain the ground gained".

NOTE II

THE GERMANS IN FLANDERS 29TH SEPTEMBER–3RD OCTOBER

In addition to the *16th Bavarian* and *52nd Reserve Divisions*, originally in reserve, which were thrown in on the 28th, the former against the Belgians, the latter near the Allied junction, the following fresh divisions were, according to regimental histories,

[1] Though Carte 36 in F.O.A. vii (ii), indicates that it was.

[2] F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 125.

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brought into action against the British on the 28th September: the *30th* and *13th Reserve* in the Gheluvelt area, the *53rd* at Vijfwegen, and the *6th Dismounted Cavalry Division* near Ledeghem. The fresh divisions employed against the Belgians were the *3rd Reserve* and the *38th Landwehr*, at Dixmude and northwards.

On the 2nd October, the *1st Bavarian Reserve Division*, which had been called to Houle (5 miles east of Ledeghem) from rest south of Lille, marched to the Hill 41 area against the British and the *30th Reserve* from a quiet sector near Loos, was entrained to Roulers and engaged against the Belgians.

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CHAPTER VII

The Battles of the Hindenburg Line (*contd.*)

Battle of the St. Quentin Canal

29th September–2nd October

The Fourth Army

29th September

(Sketch 10)

On the 29th September the Fourth Army joined in the battle.[1] Its entry was prepared by a bombardment fired by 1,044 field guns and howitzers and 593 medium and heavy guns and howitzers, which had been begun at 10.30 p.m. on the 26th and continued till zero hour.[2] BB Gas, almost identical with the German mustard gas, was fired against groups of batteries and headquarters until 6 a.m. on the 27th. This was followed by high-explosive and shrapnel, designed to destroy the key-points of the defences by sustained shelling of strongpoints and defended localities, as well as the entrances of tunnels and dug-outs, and telephone exchanges, to cut lanes in the wire entanglements and demoralize the garrison by forcing them to keep under cover; for instance, two 6-inch howitzer batteries were ordered to rest by day and each fire one round a minute during the nights of the 26th/27th, 27th/28th and 28th/29th, on the salient of the St. Quentin canal near Bellenglise.

The Fourth Army faced the Hindenburg Main System,[3] covered by the St. Quentin canal except from Bellicourt to a

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[1] G.O.C., Gen. Sir Henry Rawlinson; M.G.G.S., Major-Gen. A. A. Montgomery; D.A. & Q.M.G., Major-Gen. H. C. Holman; M.G.R.A., Major-Gen. C. E. D. Budworth; C.E., Major-Gen. R. U. H. Buckland.
On 30th August, Fourth Army headquarters had moved from Flixecourt to Bertangles (5 miles north of Amiens). On 20th September advanced headquarters had moved to Eterpigny (2½ miles south of Péronne), where, on the 28th, the remainder of the headquarters had joined it.

[2] It had been originally intended to begin the bombardment at 6 a.m. on the 27th, but when it was found that 30,000 gas shell, the first consignment with the new gas would arrive earlier than expected, the Commander-in-Chief decided at once to make use of it.

[3] See Sketch 10.

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little short of Vendhuille, in which section the canal ran in a tunnel. This gap, however, was blocked by particularly strong defences, consisting of five lines of trenches, each protected by several thick belts of wire,[1] the tunnel itself to which galleries were mined, providing safe cover for reserves. Two different problems presented themselves: the crossing of the canal, and the forcing of what were known as the "Tunnel Defences," before the Hindenburg Line itself could be reached.

The construction and nature of the "Hindenburg Line" have already been described.[2] Sited at leisure to secure full benefit from the ground and obtain flanking effect, the main position had a front trench and a support trench two to three hundred yards behind it. Every adjunct of field fortification in the shape of wire, concrete machine-gun and field-gun emplacements, dug-outs for supports and tunnels for reserves, had been employed to strengthen it, and to increase its depth. Behind the main system were the "Hindenburg Support Line" and the "Hindenburg Reserve Line" (later known as the "Beaurevoir Line"), both, until the battle was imminent, only single lines of trenches with uncompleted wiring. Considerable knowledge of the position had been derived from air photographs and the reports of repatriated refugees; and on the 8th August a defence scheme, complete in every detail of the lines between the Oise and Bellicourt, had been captured at a German headquarters. It contained the situation of every dug-out, machine-gun emplacement, battle station and headquarters, sound-ranging, flash-spotting and observation posts, even barrage lines. It also revealed signal communications, electric power installations and ammunition and supply depôts, railheads, billets, balloon sheds and landing grounds. The scheme was undated, but evidently drawn up early in 1917, and alterations in the disposition of the garrison owing to the development of the defence in depth had no doubt taken place; the garrison, however, must obviously be tied to the existing protection and the information enabled the bombardment to be directed upon the vital centres.

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[1] See sketches in "Regt. No. 60" and "Regt. No. 65".

[2] In "1917" Vol. I. It was not a line but a system or series of positions.

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It was estimated that the front to be attacked by the Fourth Army was held by seven divisions, and that they could be reinforced by six more from reserve within 72 hours.[1]

Some changes in the composition of the Fourth Army, as already mentioned in the last volume, had taken place after the battles of Havrincourt (12th September) and Epéhy (18th September) and other preliminary encounters in front of the Hindenburg Position. The American II Corps (Major-General G. W. Read), consisting of the 27th and 30th Divisions (Major-Generals J. F. O'Ryan and E. M. Lewis), which had been training with the British Second Army, had joined it and had been combined for the battle with the Australians, to form an Australian–American Corps under Lieut.-General Sir John Monash.[2]

On the 29th September, the array of the Fourth Army was:

IX. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir W. Braithwaite):

6th, 1st and 46th Divisions (the last having relieved the 4th Australian Division, which went to a rest area near Amiens).

32nd Division in reserve.

Australian-American Corps (Lieut.-General Sir J. Monash):

30th and 27th American Divisions (which relieved the 1st Australian of the Australian Corps and 74th and 18th Divisions of the III Corps).[3]

5th and 3rd Australian Divisions in support. 2nd Australian Division and 5th Cavalry Brigade (2nd Cavalry Division) in reserve.

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[1] Prisoners from eight divisions were taken on the 29th: in their order south to north, *79th Reserve*, *2nd*, *75th Reserve*, *185th*, *121st*, *8th* and *54th*; the *11th* came up from the Fontaine Uterle area to support the *79th Reserve*. Four of these were rated 3rd class, three, 2nd class and only one 1st class; and they had been in the line from various dates between 18th and 25th September.

Six divisions did appear in the next 72 hours: *2nd Guard*, *21st* (both on the afternoon of the 29th), *25th Reserve*, *84th*, *119th* and *221st*. Two of these were rated 1st class, three 2nd class and one (*84th*) 4th class. All were from rest, but two from short rest only.

[2] For all matters except operations the American divisions remained under Major-General Read. To facilitate co-ordination, an Australian Mission was formed and attached to the American II Corps.

[3] The 1st Australian Division went to a rest area near Abbeville.

The 74th Division (less artillery) entrained for the Fifth Army. The 18th remained in the III Corps.

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III Corps (Lieut.-General Sir R. Butler) :
12th Division (which had relieved the 58th[1].
18th Division in reserve.

XIII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir T. Morland) in Army reserve :
25th, 50th and 66th Divisions from the Fifth Army.

Cavalry Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. Kavanagh)[2] :
1st and 3rd Cavalry Divisions, 4th Guards Brigade, Household Machine-Gun Brigade.
34th Brigade (11th Division, with the Canadian Corps) as Army Troops :

Tanks : (Major-General Sir H. Elles) :
III Brigade, 5th and 9th Battalions (Mark V) ; 6th Battalion (whippets), attached to IX Corps ;
IV Brigade : 1st and 4th Battalions (Mark V) American 301st Battalion Mark V*, attached to Australian–American Corps.
V. Brigade, 3rd (whippets), 8th, 13th (Mark V), 16th (Mark V*) and 17th Armoured Car Battalions, attached to Australian–American Corps.

Royal Air Force :
V. Brigade (Br.-General L. E. O. Charlton), increased to 17 squadrons (9 fighter, 1 fighter reconnaissance, 1 day bomber, 1 night bomber and 5 corps), totalling 337 aircraft (48 temporarily unserviceable).

The operation orders of General Rawlinson[3] were issued on the 22nd September, soon after the receipt on that day of the formal order of G.H.Q.[4]

As early as possible, the IX and III Corps were to secure the " Preliminary Objective " ; if the III Corps could not capture it before its relief, the American II Corps was to do so. This objective was the top of a ridge overlooking a broad valley, with " Tunnel Hill " (over the canal tunnel) beyond.

The allotment of objectives followed :—

Australian–American Corps :

The two American divisions were to capture the first objective, when the Australian divisions would leap-frog

[1] The 58th Division entrained to go to the First Army.
[2] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. A. F. Home ; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. J. C. G. Longmore ; B.G.R.A., Br.-Gen. H. S. Seligman ; C.R.E., Lieut.-Colonel W. H. Evans.
[3] Appendix VI.
[4] Given at the beginning of Chapter II.

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and capture the second objective, and the American divisions go on and exploit to the right and left.

IX. Corps :—

To attack simultaneously with the Australian–American Corps, capture both objectives and exploit southwards to assist the French First Army.

III Corps

To hold a defensive front between the Australian–American Corps and the Third Army until the former reached the first objective and began exploitation, when it would mop up the ground west of the canal.[1]

These orders were explained at a conference and amplified by instructions similar to those issued before the offensive of the 8th August, including such details as a reminder to block the entrances to the galleries leading from the Bellenglise and Bellicourt Tunnels,[2] whilst for crossing the canal three thousand life belts were obtained (from the cross-Channel steamers) for issue to the storming parties. An attempt to lower the water in the canal by cutting the embankment by shell-fire, failed.

Strategic surprise was out of the question, and tactical surprise was feasible only as regards the time of assault; for the place, even without the bombardment necessary to destroy the wire, was obvious; but all the usual measures for secrecy were enforced, and after the 23rd September all movements of troops and transport took place by night.

The III Corps did not try to secure the "preliminary objective" before the 74th and 18th Divisions handed over to the American 27th Division[3] on the night of the 24th/25th. Sir Douglas Haig was averse to the Americans being employed for this preliminary step, wishing to keep them intact for the main attack; but General Rawlinson made difficulties, submitted lengthy reasons in writing, and Sir Douglas Haig gave way.

[1] Hatched on Sketch 10.

[2] The former could accommodate about 3,000 men; the latter, many more, as it was 6,000 yards long.

[3] The American division was twice as strong in infantry as the British, and contained two brigades each of two regiments of three battalions; three machine-gun battalions; one engineer regiment; but the 27th and 30th, not having received any replacements, were below establishment. The artillery was provided by the British. To prevent confusion, the regiment, the equivalent of the British brigade is usually taken as the unit in this narrative.

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The American 30th Division found itself practically on the line from which the attack would be launched, and was able by means of minor operations to make good the whole of it. The American 27th Division, on the other hand, was about eleven hundred yards west of its jumping-off position. The operation to gain this was carried out at 5.30 a.m. on the 27th September, by the 106th Regiment (53rd Brigade) after a gas and H.E. bombardment during the night, under a barrage fired by nine field artillery brigades supported by 12 tanks of the IV Tank Brigade. The morning was wet and misty, and the R.A.F. could give no assistance in reporting progress, so that it was impossible to continue artillery support. Hard fighting continued all day, and in places the objective was reached. Gillemont Farm and the right sector nearest to the 30th Division were certainly taken, but could not be held, owing to heavy casualties, and German counter-attacks forced the withdrawal of many of the advanced parties; so that at night the 27th Division line was established in approximately the same position as before the attack, but with parties out in front. Of the 12 tanks, eight reached the objective, five in all were disabled in crossing an unrecorded minefield laid by the Fifth Army in March 1918, two of them whilst going into action and three when returning from it. Of the three supply tanks, two were hit and one ditched, but two loads of ammunition in all were delivered to troops in the front line.

The failure to complete the capture of the "preliminary objective" complicated the final preparations on the American front. The barrage had already been calculated and barrage maps issued: to alter it might cause confusion; the knowledge that parties of American troops, including a number of wounded, were still in and near the "preliminary objective" made it impossible to bring the barrage farther back. It was therefore decided by General Rawlinson that the barrage must remain as originally planned, that the American 27th Division should form up as near as possible to the barrage line one hour before Zero, and, assisted by an additional number of tanks, should fight its way forward to the barrage line by zero hour. Otherwise the final preparations of the Fourth Army, including an adjustment of the fronts of the 6th and 1st Divisions of the IX Corps, were made without a hitch.

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After a dark and stormy night, the early morning of the 29th September, not unlike that of the 8th August, was fine but with ground fog (as foretold by Lieut.-Colonel E. Gold of the Meteorological Section), making, combined with the smoke of battle, air co-operation nearly impossible. Owing to the recent rains the surface of the ground was soft and slippery, but hard underneath. The tanks had reached their starting line during the night, and those co-operating with the infantry now waiting in the shelter of trenches, shell holes and sunken roads, moved forward just before Zero, in order to pass through the infantry starting line at that hour, their purring drowned by the roar of the bombardment and the drone of aeroplanes.

It fell to the IX Corps[1] to force the passage of the St. Quentin canal. By Lieut.-General Braithwaite's order, the 46th (1st North Midland) Division (Major-General G. F. Boyd),[2] on the left of the corps, was to cross the canal and take the first objective, where the 32nd Division would pass through and take the second; the 1st Division would detail a detachment to follow the right of the 46th Division and form a flank as far as Bellenglise, and during the advance of the 46th and 32nd Divisions maintain steady pressure on the enemy opposite; the 6th Division on the extreme right of the corps, would at first maintain a defensive attitude, but keep touch with the enemy by means of patrols, and demonstrate with gas and smoke.

From the front of the 46th Division the country dipped down towards the canal, so that the British overlooked the German defences.[3] West of the canal, on a slight rise, was a continuous line of trenches, with frequent strongpoints and machine-gun nests in it, protected by a broad belt of wire. Other belts of wire and well sited machine-gun and rifle posts covered the crossings at Bellenglise and Riqueval Bridge. The bed of the canal itself, about 35 feet wide,

[1] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. H. E. Street; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. C. D. H. Moore; B.G.R.A., Br.-Gen. G. Humphreys; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. G. B. Mackenzie; C.E., Br.-Gen. G. S. Cartwright.

[2] Major-Gen. Sir Gerald Boyd, who died as Military Secretary at the War Office, gained his commission from the ranks of the Devonshire Regiment in the S. African War 1899–1902. In August 1914 he was a captain and brigade-major of the 11th Brigade.

[3] Held by the *79th Reserve* and *2nd Divisions* and part of the *75th Reserve* with the *11th Division* in reserve.

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was like the ditch of a fortress, defended by belts of wire in the water and on the banks, and by flanking emplacements. The southern portion of the canal on the 46th Division front ran on the level and contained little water but had 8 feet of mud; the defences here were stronger than to the north, where the depth of the water ranged from 7 to 10 feet at the bottom of a cutting, with sides sloping at about 50° and as much as fifty feet deep. The canal walls throughout were 10 feet high and faced with brick.

Besides the three thousand life-belts, small floating piers constructed of petrol tins or corkslabs in wooden framework, light collapsible boats, mud-mats,[1] life-lines and scaling ladders were provided, and on the 28th a rehearsal of the crossing was carried out on the Somme.

For the repair of the existing bridges over the canal and the construction of others as soon as possible, twelve engineer companies were detailed under Br.-General G. S. Cartwright, the Chief Engineer of the corps, viz. the field companies of the 32nd and 46th Divisions, the 216th, 254th 567th and 574th (Army Troops) Companies, and the 180th and 256th Tunnelling Companies.

The 137th Brigade (Br.-General J. V. Campbell) was selected to make the assault, the 138th and 139th Brigades (Br.-Generals F. G. M. Rowley and J. Harington) following, and it placed all three Staffordshire battalions (6/South, 5/South and 6/North) in the line.[2] The pace of the barrage as far as the Hindenburg Line east of the canal was put at a hundred yards in two minutes, twice as fast as normal, for Major-General Boyd meant that his men should rush down the slope to the canal.[3] After crossing it three halts would be made, on the eastern bank and on two intermediate lines.

[1] Rolls of canvas, reinforced by reeds from the marshes, woven in and out of the material.

[2] In making his dispositions Major-General Boyd had to consider (i) that the leading brigade might fail to get across the canal, in which case he must keep the others to pass over Tunnel Hill in the American sector; (ii) that the leading brigade might not be able to hold its position if it did succeed, in which case support would be necessary.

[3] The 6/S. Staffordshire attacked in four waves each of one company on a frontage of 400 yards with 100 yards between companies; the 5/South Staffordshire had two companies in front line, each on a frontage of 500 yards, and the other two companies combined in support; the 6/North Staffordshire was on a frontage of 800 yards with two companies in front and two in support.

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At 5.50 a.m. the assault was launched : the canal defences had mostly been destroyed by the heavy artillery, which maintained fire on the canal banks until the last possible moment ;[1] and the field artillery barrage,[2] though fired without registration, was described as one of the finest ever seen ; the mist on this occasion certainly favoured the attackers.

The 137th Brigade stormed the outpost line and the western trenches, the German counter-barrage coming down five minutes after Zero and falling on British and Germans alike, and the Staffordshire men reached the canal well up to time and with very few casualties, taking one hundred and twenty prisoners. In the shallow water of the southern sector the crossing was made by the leading parties on rafts and by life-lines, and a single-plank bridge left intact by the Germans, and in the northern sector by use of the life-belts and by hauling men across on planks. Riqueval bridge, on the main route for the supply of the Germans on the western bank, was secured intact by a company of the 6/North Staffordshire detailed for the purpose : an officer and nine men, rushed the machine gun defending it and seized the bridge before the enemy demolition party which was sheltering from the bombardment could fire the charge, and shot the whole party as it was racing to the bridge to carry out its duty. The company then crossed and took one hundred and thirty prisoners, including a battalion staff.

The three battalions of the 137th Brigade were reorganized under the protection of a standing barrage and went forward again when it lifted at 7.30 a.m. to the first intermediate line. After bayonets had been used against the machine-gunners, the Germans scattered in all directions, many escaping in the fog and smoke. A pause was then made for half an hour and the supporting companies passed through, two making for the Bellenglise Tunnel (the western entrance to which had been blocked by 12-inch shell fire), bombing cellars and entrances and capturing many prisoners, 800 in the tunnel. Some of these Germans revealed the arrangements for the demolition of the tunnel to the party of

[1] The heavy artillery brigades of the IX Corps were V, XII, XIV, XXI LXIX, LXXIX, LXXXIII and XCVIII, under Br.-General G. B. Mackenzie, of which LXIX was specially attached to the 46th Division.

[2] The artillery of the 32nd and 46th Divisions : XVI, R.H.A., V, XIV, XXIII and 232nd (Army) field brigades under Br.-General Sir S. H. Child.

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tunnellers sent to investigate. By 8.20 a.m. all three battalions had reached the second intermediate line just as the barrage lifted off it, capturing a 4-gun battery, its team and detachments.

Owing to the fog, the specially trained divisional observers could see nothing ; but news was brought back by a wounded sergeant of the " divisional mounted troop ", an improvised unit, consisting of mounted men from the divisional ammunition column and field ambulances. It was then learnt that the canal had been crossed ; so Major-General Boyd issued orders for the 139th and 138th Brigades to push over it at once. They had anticipated his orders, and soon after 8.30 a.m. had moved off, and in due course the 8/Sherwood Foresters, the advanced battalion of the 139th Brigade, mopping up Bellenglise en route, came up with the 137th Brigade on the second intermediate line. At 9.30 a.m. Major-General Boyd telephoned to the IX Corps to send up a cavalry brigade, but when it appeared, about 2.30 p.m. the German panic was over and it was too late to use cavalry.

Both the 139th and 138th Brigades advanced again as the barrage lifted at 11.20 a.m., each accompanied by eight tanks of the 9th Battalion, which, however, arrived late as they had been diverted to help the American troops who were checked at the canal crossing at Riqueval (north of Riqueval bridge). Like the 137th Brigade, the 139th and 138th had two intermediate pause lines, one half a mile eastward, the second a thousand yards on, leaving another half a mile before them to the first objective. In spite of shelling, the first line was easily reached by noon. By then visibility was fast improving and the smoke barrage had nearly dissipated ; in consequence the 139th Brigade was troubled by fire from the area south of the canal on the front of the 1st Division, and its tanks were knocked out by a battery there. A party of the 6/Sherwood Foresters re-crossed the canal, however, and bayoneted or shot the gunners, their infantry escort retiring and leaving them in the lurch. The German fire had caused some delay, so, fearing the barrage might be lost, Lieut.-Colonel B. W. Vann, the commanding officer of the 6/Sherwood Foresters, dashed up to the firing line and got the attack moving again.[1]

[1] He was in Holy Orders and chaplain at Wellington College. He had early received the M.C. and was posthumously awarded the V.C. See p. 160.

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The final line, the first objective, was reached throughout its length by both brigades by 3.30 p.m., the 138th losing two tanks. Lehaucourt was cleared half an hour later, and Magny la Fosse a little earlier, the Germans surrendering, freely. The assault of the 46th Division, largely owing to the personality and foresight of its commander, Major-General Boyd and the splendid work of the IX Corps heavy artillery under Br.-General G. B. Mackenzie, had been a brilliant success, and it had lost under eight hundred men. As neither the 1st Division on the right nor the American 30th Division on the left were up, defensive flanks were formed.

Meantime, the 14th and 97th Brigades (Br.-Generals L. P. Evans and J. R. M. Minshull-Ford) of the 32nd Division (Major-General T. S. Lambert) had crossed the canal at Bellenglise and Riqueval bridge, and by 5.30 p.m. were in position on the 46th Division line. To ensure that the 32nd Division might seize the right moment to go through the 46th, Lieut.-General Braithwaite had ordered that the headquarters of the two divisions should be in the same place. Half an hour later, as darkness was coming on, the brigades of the 32nd Division went forward under a barrage, for which the infantry had waited, 6 p.m. being the earliest moment at which the 32nd Division artillery could fire it. This was unfortunately too late to reap the full advantage of the success of the 46th Division. The 14th Brigade, however, reached the second objective, capturing le Tronquoy and Flèche Wood with three hundred prisoners, three 12-inch howitzers and three 4·2-inch guns. Three of its six tanks had been knocked out whilst waiting at the starting-point; the others did not arrive in the 14th Brigade area until it was getting dark, and without an organized plan it was difficult to employ them; but their presence was useful as a demonstration. The 97th Brigade went nearly as far as the 14th, but, checked by fire from Levergies, did not reach the second objective. The ten whippets with it did good service and eight of them rallied. As the troops on either side of the 32nd Division were unable to come up level, defensive flanks were again formed.

The 1st Division (Major-General E. P. Strickland), with the 3rd Brigade (Br.-General Sir W. Kay) on the right, and the 1st (Br.-General L. L. Wheatley), on the left, though hampered by the fog, had little difficulty in protecting the right

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of the 46th Division, and, taking over a hundred prisoners en route, by 2.30 p.m. had advanced three-quarters of a mile to the St. Quentin–Bellicourt road. When, however, the movement was continued with a view of reaching the Thorigny–le Tronquoy road, a thousand yards ahead, heavy enfilade fire from the south compelled the leading troops to return to the St. Quentin road. The 6th Division (Major-General T. O. Marden) confined itself, as ordered, to patrolling and demonstration, and at night it was relieved by the French.

The IX Corps had taken 5,100 prisoners[1] and 90 guns, besides hundreds of machine guns and trench mortars, of which 4,200 prisoners and 72 guns were the prize of the 46th Division alone.

The attack of the two American divisions was covered by twenty-three brigades of field artillery, ten heavy brigades and five siege batteries, a total of 818 guns and howitzers. As the general result of the day was greatly affected by the difficulties of the American 27th Division, and it started before the 30th, its story will be taken first.

In order to secure all the ground which lay between the 27th Division and the "preliminary objective" of the 27th September, the leading troops pushed off at 4.50 a.m., an hour before Zero, with the special task of capturing the German centres of resistance in the intervening area, and, as suspected, Quennet Copse, Gillemont Farm, the Knoll and other localities turned out to be still in enemy possession. The division was assisted by thirty-four tanks, out of the forty detailed of the American 301st Battalion; only a few of them survived to be of any use to the infantry: twelve received direct hits and seven were ditched; others struck an old British minefield, and only ten rallied. Six tanks also of the 4th Tank Battalion started at 5.30 a.m., a thousand yards behind the others. Of these, four struck mines, but two assisted in the attack on Gillemont Farm. Owing to the uncertainty, already mentioned, as to the whereabouts of the forward troops remaining out after the previous fighting, the barrage was put down a thousand yards from the infantry starting line, beyond the localities just mentioned, and was therefore of small service. The Germans, too, warned by

[1] Of the *2nd*, *11th*, *75th Reserve* and *79th Reserve* Divisions.

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the events of the 27th, were quite ready.[1] From the first, the advance of the 108th and 107th Infantry Regiments was strongly opposed by machine guns and field guns, evidently sited to deal with tanks—seven tanks were put out of action near Gillemont Farm alone. The supporting regiments, the 106th, detailed to mop up, and the 105th, detailed to cover the left flank, owing to the check and the difficulty of liaison in the fog both became involved in the fighting. By 11 a.m. the leading parties of the division had fought their way nearly to the "preliminary objective", but had left many Germans overlooked behind them. Some parties had indeed pushed on beyond their objective, even as far as the Hindenburg front line, but only to be surrounded and in the end forced to surrender or die.

The American 30th Division, in the same formation as the 27th, had with it thirty-three out of thirty-five tanks detailed (eighteen of them rallied). Its 120th Regiment, pushing on well close up to the barrage, crossed both the Main Hindenburg Line and the Hindenburg Support Line, with their maze of trenches and wire, and reached Nauroy, a gain of nearly four thousand yards; the 119th came under fire from the American 27th Division area and faced that way. Bellicourt and the southern entrance of the canal tunnel, however, were taken, and the right almost reached the Hindenburg Support north of Nauroy, some parties of both regiments actually penetrating as far as the first objective. The keenness of the Americans led them to press on, and in the fog and smoke supervision being impossible, to a great degree the business of mopping up was overlooked. Later, it being found that the front of the 119th was unduly extended, it was reinforced by a battalion each from the 117th and 118th Infantry Regiments. Whilst the fighting was in progress about 9 a.m. the 17th Armoured Car Battalion (9 cars), with a company of eight whippets, moved down the Hargicourt–Bony road. They found Bony in enemy occupation and did some execution; but half the force (4 cars and 4 whippets) were put out of action, and the rest were withdrawn into cover.

[1] The two American divisions were opposed on their exact front from Riqueval to the northern entrance of Bellicourt tunnel by 3 divisions and part of a fourth: *75th Reserve*, (part), *185th*, *121st*, *8th*. The reserve, *21st Division*, was behind Nauroy. The *54th Division* was around Vendhuille.

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The 5th and 3rd Australian Divisions (Major-Generals Sir J. Talbot Hobbs and J. Gellibrand), which were to pass through the American divisions and take the second objective, left their assembly places, about four miles behind the front line, at 7 a.m., with a view to passing through it four hours later. Again to take the left first, the 11th and 10th Brigades (Br.-Generals J. H. Cannan and W. R. McNicoll) of the 3rd Australian Division, each with eight tanks (all were put out of action by direct hits or mines) soon after crossing the original starting-line of the American 27th Division at 9 a.m., came under heavy gun-fire, besides machine-gun fire from Gillemont Farm ridge. Little information could be gained, and the fog prevented much of what was going on from being seen; but, though many prisoners were passed back, it was soon evident by the volume of fire that the line of localities was as yet unbroken. Major-General Gellibrand thereupon decided to put in his 11th and 10th Brigades at once to assist the Americans to complete their task ,without waiting until he heard that they had gained the first objective. He sent his 9th Brigade (Br.-General H. A. Goddard) towards Bellicourt, which he heard was in the hands of the American 30th Division, thence to make a flank attack. As visibility improved enemy shelling, particularly from the north, greatly increased, and by noon no material progress had been made. The line was east of Quennet Copse, west of Quennemont Farm, on the western edge of Gillemont Farm, and the Knoll was held by the 54th Brigade (18th Division of the III Corps); but the enemy was working up the Macquincourt valley between the last two localities and making repeated counter-attacks against the Knoll.

The attack of the 3rd Australian Division was renewed at 3 p.m. with the approval of Lieut.-General Monash, in combination with the 5th Australian Division, without artillery support for the 3rd Division, owing to the uncertainty as regards the location of the Americans. The advance of the 11th and 10th Brigades was met by a storm of bullets and shells, and it was obvious that the first objective could not be gained in daylight; but an advance of about three hundred and fifty yards was made, and eventually Quennemont and Gillemont Farms, and the ridge between them were captured. As the Germans had succeeded in temporarily regaining a footing on the eastern side of the Knoll,

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thus threatening the left of the 3rd Australian Division and the right of the III Corps, a battalion of the 9th Australian Brigade was sent to the head of the Macquincourt valley. On the right, contact was obtained with the 5th Australian Division in the Hindenburg Position, due south of Bony.

The 5th Australian Division, led by its 15th Brigade (Br.-General H. E. Elliott), had at 9 a.m. reached the starting-line without incident; but beyond this line progress was hampered by machine guns which had come into action as soon as the American 30th Division had passed over them. Nevertheless, the front line of the Hindenburg Position was crossed, and the line of the Bellicourt tunnel north of the valley, two thousand yards ahead, reached by 11 a.m. As no information could be obtained as to the situation in front, the western side of the tunnel embankment was occupied by the 57th Battalion and the 58th Battalion (which had been in support). The left battalion, the 59th, could not advance as fast, coming in touch and becoming mixed up with the right of the 3rd Australian Division, and having great difficulty in reaching the Hindenburg Line owing to fire from the Quennemont Farm area to the north. Isolated German parties were still holding out in the front trenches of the position, but they were settled with; the support trenches were also cleared, and enemy bombing attacks down the trenches from the north repulsed. The enemy resistance having considerably stiffened, Major-General Talbot Hobbs arranged, as the 3rd Australian Division had done, for an organized renewal of the attack at 3 p.m. by the 15th Brigade, with the 8th (Br.-General E. Tivey) on its right. Eight Mark V tanks and eight whippet tanks took part with the 15th, but all the former machines and five of the latter were put out of action in the first fifteen minutes, and the four Mark V with the 8th Brigade were also soon disabled. A light barrage was fired, but it served no more than as a warning, with the result that the enemy machine-gunners manned the Hindenburg Support Their fire did not stop the 15th Australian Brigade passing through the parties of the American 30th Division and seizing the Hindenburg Support, except on the left, where, as before, enfilade fire led to the flank hanging back, but connected with the 3rd Australian Division. The 8th Australian Brigade not only passed through the Americans and got abreast of the 32nd Division (IX Corps), but the right

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battalion had gone on half a mile to Joncourt, whence, finding itself alone, it fell back into the general line.

The task of the III Corps[1] (to which six field artillery brigades, three heavy brigades and three siege batteries were allotted, 244 guns and howitzers in all) was to form the connecting link between the Australian–American Corps and the Third Army, and thus protect the left flank of the former as it advanced. To perform this task Lieut.-General Butler detailed the 12th (Eastern) Division and directed Major-General H. W. Higginson to hold the whole of the short corps frontage, gain ground as the forces on either side advanced, and form a defensive flank if only one of them did so. The 18th (Eastern) Division (Major-General R. P. Lee), leaving the 53rd Brigade (Br.-General M. G. H. Barker) in corps reserve, was to assemble its other two brigades inside the American 27th Division area; the 54th Brigade (Lieut.-Colonel R. Turner, acting) was to guard the left of the American 27th Division, detailing as connecting link, a special liaison force of two infantry companies, one machine gun company, the 80th Field Company R.E. and personnel of a signal section; the 55th Brigade (Br.-General E. A. Wood) was to be ready to advance any time after 8 a.m. to protect the left of the 54th, and to mop up Vendhuille as opportunity offered.

The 54th Brigade reached its first objective, Macquincourt Trench (about 700 yards east of the summit of the Knoll), but found that the Americans had drifted southwards; it could get no farther, although it managed to repel all German counter-attacks. The 55th Brigade, whilst halted north of Lempire at 8.45 a.m., was informed by advanced divisional headquarters by telephone that the American attack was going well, and that it was to proceed at once with its task of mopping up Vendhuille. After going forward a thousand yards to a farm, Br.-General Wood could see machine-gun fire sweeping the slopes just in front. The brigade was therefore ordered to halt. Four hours later he was instructed by the division to send a battalion against the enemy north-east of Gillemont Farm; fire prevented this movement being executed. Eventually the brigade occupied a line from the

[1] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. C. G. Fuller; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. J. F. I. H. Doyle; B.G.R.A., Br.-Gen. C. M. Ross-Johnson; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. A. E. J. Perkins; C.E., Br.-Gen. A. Rolland.

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old front abreast of Lempire to the southern edge of the Knoll to connect the 54th Brigade, thus protecting the right of the III Corps.

The French First Army, on the right of the British, supported them " only by fire and a demonstration " on a 3½ mile frontage about three miles south of St. Quentin.[1] The American–French offensive in the Argonne was continued.

The results of the day were less than had been hoped; but on the right a three-mile thrust had been made into the German front and the greater part of the Hindenburg Main Position and about half of the Hindenburg Support had been captured. After discussing the situation with Lieut.-General Monash and Major-General Read, the commander of the Fourth Army decided to withdraw the American II Corps for a short rest and to carry on the attack with the IX, the Australian and the XIII Corps, the last in place of the very tired III Corps. which had been in action since the 8th August.

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON 29TH SEPTEMBER

Some extracts from the German regimental stories of this fateful day are given below. But the most important event was the meeting of a Council of War held at Spa at 10 a.m. to consider the Hindenburg–Ludendorff demand for an immediate armistice. There were present besides these two generals, Admiral von Hintze (the Foreign Minister), Colonel Heye (Operations Branch of the General Staff), Captain Niemann (General Staff representative with the Kaiser) and apparently others.[2]

" General Ludendorff gave us an account of the military situa-
" tion, saying: ' the situation of the Army demands an immediate
" ' armistice in order to save a catastrophe ' ".[3] Ludendorff

[1] F.O.A. vii (i), p. 14.

[2] A fuller account, with authorities cited, will be found in an article in the *Army Quarterly* for January 1941, entitled " The German Defeat in " 1918. How Ludendorff tried to Exonerate the Army ".

[3] Hintze's evidence before the Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry. See " Ursachen des deutschen Zusammenbruch im Jahre 1918 ", ii, p. 400.

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subsequently denied having used the word "catastrophe", but it is undisputed that he said "our situation admits of no "delay, not an hour is to be lost". Primed as to what was required of him, Admiral von Hintze suggested "revolution from "above" as a way of passing on the blame, and an appeal to President Wilson on the basis of his Fourteen Points.[1] To this Hindenburg and Ludendorff agreed. Hintze has explained what he meant by "revolution from above" His words were "set "going from above on the initiative of the Monarch, it should form "a bridge to make transition from victory [the German public "had so far been kept hypnotized by accounts of victories] to "make defeat bearable by bringing into co-operation with the "Government as many interested people as possible": that is the Kaiser was graciously to bestow representative government, so that the political triumph of the Socialists would make them oblivious to the national defeat and they would be saddled with the blame for it: at the same time it would give the world the idea that the nation was united and would fight to the last man. Hintze, with Hindenburg and Ludendorff, had an audience with the Kaiser, who gave his consent to "revolution from above", and signed a decree announcing the introduction of parliamentary government. Payer, the Vice-Chancellor, who was present, had agreed; but when Hertling, the Chancellor, arrived later, he was, as he told his son, deeply perturbed at the demand for an immediate armistice and peace offer. His request to resign office was granted, and Prince Max of Baden, whose sympathies were liberal-socialist, was offered the Chancellorship. He hesitated for some days to accept and only did so when Payer declared that to prevent further delay he would as Vice-Chancellor sign the demand for an armistice.

It may be added here that Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who had returned to O.H.L., after further disasters in the field on the 29th and 30th, telephoned at 1 p.m. on the 1st October, to their

[1] President Wilson's Fourteen Points were, shortly: (1) Open publication of all peace treaties. (2) Freedom of the seas. (3) Removal of all economic barriers between nations. (4) Reduction of armaments. (5) Thorough examination of all colonial claims. (6) Evacuation and re-establishment of Russia. (7) Evacuation, re-establishment and guarantee of the sovereignty of Belgium. (8) Freeing and re-establishment of the occupied territories of France, as well as the making good of the injustice done by Prussia to the French 50 years ago as regards Alsace-Lorraine. (9) Adjustment of the Italian frontiers according to national populations. (10) Autonomous development of the peoples of Austria-Hungary. (11) Evacuation of Rumania, Serbia and Montenegro and the restitution of occupied territories. (12) Independence of the Turkish portions of the Osmanli Empire and the assurance of the lives and property of the other nationalities living under Turkish rule. Freedom of the Dardanelles. (13) Creation of an independent Polish State, with inclusion of all the districts inhabited by an undoubted Polish population and the assurance of free access to the sea. (14) Formation of a League of Nations.

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liaison officer with the *Reichstag*, Major von der Bussche, the following message, which was to reach Prince Max in the presence of the Vice-Chancellor and the Foreign Minister, Ludendorff, speaking:

"If before 7–8 o'clock this evening assurance is given that "Prince Max of Baden will form a Government, I agree to the "postponement of the publication of the demand for an armistice "until to-morrow morning. Should, on the other hand, the "formation of the Government be in any way doubtful, I main- "tain that the issue of the declaration to the foreign Governments "is required this very night".

Next day, at 9 a.m., Major von der Bussche gave the *Reichstag* party leaders an account of the situation and told them "the "war is lost".

The regimental histories are full of excuses for defeat: fog (which helped the Germans in March 1918), gas and tanks. "Regt. No. 33" (*2nd Division*) south of Bellenglise, in addition, says that from the 27th September the fighting troops were dependent on their iron ration; the artillery was partly out of action, and the tank defence guns had for a long time been rendered useless. The demand for a barrage was not answered at once (it came down in under five minutes). "In vain we "waited for a counter-attack and for effective artillery fire to "enable us to hang on . . . The exits from Bellenglise tunnel "are blocked with machine-gun fire and the occupants lost". The remnants of the division rallied west of Joncourt. But "Gren. Regt. No. 4" says its battalions were driven eastward from Joncourt at 1 p.m. "Res. Regt. No. 261" (*79th Reserve Division*, south of the *2nd Division*) speaks of another tunnel at le Tronquoy, whose northern and southern exits were occupied by the British and many of its emergency exits set on fire.

Regiments of the *75th Reserve Division* (which held from north of Bellenglise, exclusive, to Bellicourt, exclusive) add some items: that very few men could escape by running into the tunnel; that little was known of the first (American) attack, as it was shot to pieces, and no mention is made of more than small parties of American prisoners; that a noon attack was repulsed, but a 1.45 p.m. attack drove the division back and Nauroy was lost. The division was then reinforced by the *21st Division* (from second line).

Regiments of the *185th Division*, which had a short front from Bellicourt (inclusive) to Malakoff Wood (exclusive), describe mainly hand-grenade fighting. "Regt. No. 65" asserts that tanks broke through and reached Folemprise Farm behind it.

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(There is no record of any tank or armoured car getting so far.) After midday, swarms of aeroplanes flew close over the trenches and machine-gunned them. It is claimed that a 6 p.m. attack was repulsed, but, owing to a gap on the left, the division had to retire, the *65th Regiment* being reduced to 3 officers and forty men.

The *121st Division* held the "Tunnel Position" (5 lines of trenches over the canal tunnel), up to and including Gillemont Farm, with an advanced position through Quennemont Farm. Gillemont Farm changed hands four times and fierce fighting took place everywhere. The Tunnel Position was lost owing to the division in the south failing, but it was recovered about 4 p.m. with the help of part of the *21st Division*. At 6 p.m. an order was issued to stop counter-attacks.

"Regt. No. 153" of the *8th Division* claims to have recovered the "Sappenberg" (The Knoll), after losing it to an attack by British in front and by an American battalion from the left flank: It then "remained fast in the hands of the regiment . . . The "position was evacuated at 2 a.m. according to order . . . At "4 a.m. the regiment was established in the new position east of "the Schelde canal".

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CHAPTER VIII

Battle of the Canal du Nord (*continued*)

29th September

The First Army (Right Wing) and the Third Army

(Sketches 4, 6)

The Third Army[1]

The Third Army had on the 28th secured small bridgeheads across the Schelde canal south of Cambrai, near Marcoing and Cantaing, and on the 29th it was to go forward in co-operation with the Fourth Army. For the continuation of the operations, General Byng issued orders at 12.10 p.m. on the 28th :

> " V. and IV Corps will attack to-night with objectives " Villers Guislain, Gonnelieu and la Vacquerie. Subse- " quent operations as laid down in Third Army No. " G.S. 76/24, dated 24th September [advance to the " line of the Schelde canal : Honnecourt–Crèvecoeur]. " IV Corps must keep pace with and protect right of the " VI Corps.
>
> " VI Corps to continue operations for gaining and " extending bridgehead across Schelde canal.
>
> " XVII Corps to continue operations for encircling " Cambrai from the south ".

The reason for ordering the V and IV Corps to attack " to-night "—that is before the Fourth Army zero hour, 5.50 a.m., the hour of the general advance—was obvious. When operating on the 27th and 28th, whilst the Fourth Army stood fast, the Third Army had to guard its own right flank, so the V and IV Corps had swung forward only a short distance. Now they were required to come up level to join in the general offensive, and to enable them to do so, 3.30 a.m., when the moon, then in its last quarter, would have

[1] See Sketch 6.

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risen, was selected as their starting time. As it turned out, though the centre and the left of the Third Army were very successful the right made little progress; for the Germans opposite it had retired from Gouzeaucourt early on the previous day, and, not being followed, had had time to settle down. The Gonnelieu–la Vacquerie ridge therefore was strongly held, as was also Villers Guislain, which commands the valley between the ridge and Gonnelieu.

Few aircraft and tanks were available to help the Third Army, as many as possible having been allotted to the Fourth Army for its task of breaking the " Hindenburg Line ".

The attack of the 33rd Division (Major-General Sir R. Pinney), the right wing of the V Corps (Lieut.-General C. D. Shute)[1] was a failure. The 98th Brigade (Br.-General J. D. Heriot-Maitland) went forward at 3.30 a.m. down the slope towards Villers Guislain to come up level with the 100th Brigade (Br.-General A. W. F. Baird) on its right, and at 5.30 a.m. both brigades were to advance together. A barrage was fired by three brigades of field artillery.[2] Rain had ceased, but the valleys were full of mist, and the moonlight very faint. Resistance was strong; but with the help of one tank out of the three which started, the eastern end of Villers Guislain and the road south from it were reached. An immediate counter-attack by the enemy recovered the southern part of the village, and during the morning Germans began filtering back into the northern portion. To avert its being surrounded the brigade was, in the evening, ordered to withdraw to the starting line. This it succeeded in doing, bringing 250 prisoners with it.

Without knowing the result of the 98th Brigade's night attack, two battalions of the 100th went forward at 5.50 a.m. Their leading troops ran into heavy fire and the messenger sent to order them back, when the position of the 98th was discovered, was captured; so few of them returned. During the morning the remainder of the two battalions were withdrawn to the starting-line.

[1] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. R. H. Mangles; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. H. M. de F. Montgomery; B.G.R.A., Br.-Gen. R. P. Benson; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. A. M. Tyler; C.E., Br.-Gen. A. G. Stevenson.

[2] Two of the 33rd and one of the 21st Division, under Br.-General G. H. W. Nicholson.

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The 21st Division (Major-General D. G. M. Campbell) also accomplished nothing. The 110th and 62nd Brigades (Br.-Generals H. R. Cumming and G. H. Gater), each with two tanks, attacked across the valley at the same time, 3.30 a.m., as the 98th Brigade on their right. They had the support of a deep barrage fired by four brigades of field artillery,[1] at first slow, 100 yards in six minutes, whilst the 60-pdrs. attached to the division shelled Gonnelieu and selected targets. In the 110th Brigade one of the leading companies succeeded in advancing about five hundred yards; the other two were soon held up. In the 62nd Brigade one battalion was late and missed the barrage; part of another reached the objective south of Gonnelieu, but, being isolated, had to be withdrawn; one tank broke into Gonnelieu, there to be knocked out: the other did not reach the starting point. Arrangements were made by Major-General Campbell to turn Gonnelieu from the north, but when he learnt that the progress of the 5th Division (IV Corps) on the left had not been as satisfactory as first reported, he ordered the attempt to be abandoned. The V Corps' effort had therefore been mainly in vain.

Zero hour in the IV Corps was also 3.30 a.m., but here the progress was considerable, the centre and left of the New Zealand Division (Major-General Sir A. H. Russell) being completely successful in gaining all objectives, although its right and the 5th Division (Major-General J. Ponsonby), on that flank, could not go quite so far.

The 5th and 42nd Divisions were in the line, but, by Lieut.-General Harper's orders, issued at 11.20 a.m. on the 28th, the New Zealand Division was to pass through the 42nd, with la Vacquerie and the farther edge of Welsh Ridge as the first objective, and the Gouzeaucourt–Cambrai road as the second. This road passes across and then along the southern side of Bonavis Ridge, to turn northward at Bois Lateau, its eastern end, and run dead straight by Masnières into Cambrai. The 5th Division was to co-operate on the right.

To take the New Zealand Division first: the 2nd and 1st New Zealand Brigades (Br.-Generals R. Young and C. W. Melvill) were by the evening of the 28th in position of

[1] Of the 17th and 38th Divisions, under Br.-General H. W. Newcome.

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readiness behind Highland Ridge, and the artillery to cover them—the six brigades of field artillery which had fired for the 42nd Division on the 27th/28th—was moved forward at dusk. Welsh Ridge was easily taken by the 2nd New Zealand Brigade by 4.30 a.m.; but beyond this point resistance was stronger, and it was 1 p.m. before la Vacquerie[1] and Bonavis Ridge were secured. Heavy fighting followed, the leading companies being mixed with troops of the 5th Division, and it was not until after dark that they were able to advance again and reach the Cambrai road, the final objective.

The 1st New Zealand Brigade overcame all resistance, rushed the Marcoing Line[2], and by 8 a.m. had established a line in a trench about a thousand yards east of the Cambrai road.

The 5th Division, on the right of the New Zealand Division, was early in difficulties. The 95th Brigade (Br.-General C. B. Norton) had barely reached its position by zero hour, and then found the pace of the barrage (100 yards in 3 minutes) too fast over broken ground and trench warfare obstacles. The 15th Brigade (Br.-General R. D. F. Oldman) was to have leap-frogged the 95th at the first objective, the Gonnelieu–la Vacquerie road, and then taken Banteux. Finding the 95th hung up short of the road, the 15th attempted to pass through. The two brigades became mixed, but they eventually established a line in trenches twelve hundred yards from the starting-line in touch with the New Zealand Division near la Vacquerie, short of the first objective.

The VI Corps was to continue its operation to enlarge the bridgehead it had secured at the Marcoing elbow of the Schelde crossing. Lieut.-General Sir A. Haldane employed the 62nd and 2nd Divisions (Major-Generals Sir R. D. Whigham and C. E. Pereira) already in the line, with the same artillery support as on the previous day. Zero hours were respectively 7.30 and 5 a.m., as the 2nd Division had still to force the Marcoing line, which the 62nd had crossed and turned.[3]

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[1] Held by the *Jäger Division*.

[2] Held by the *113th Division*.

[3] On the 28th the *9th Division*, coming from Lille by train from the Festubert sector, had reinforced the *3rd Naval Division*, which held the line between Rumilly (inclusive) and the Faubourg de Paris, south of Cambrai, and they fought mixed together on the 29th.

To the north, the *18th Division* was holding the western edge of Cambrai.

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The 187th Brigade of the 62nd Division on the right, which besides the artillery barrage had all the machine-gun support possible, was to advance eastward astride the canal and capture Masnières. Its new boundary with the 186th Brigade ran between Masnières and Rumilly, so the left battalion had to cross the canal to reach its starting line; this it was able to do unhindered in the heavy mist, which also served to save the attackers from enemy machine-gun fire. Following the barrage closely, the 2/4th and 5/K.O.Y.L.I. captured Masnières with three hundred prisoners, and by noon had established themselves east of the town.

In the 186th Brigade (Br.-General J. L. G. Burnett) the 2/4th Duke of Wellington's also crossed the canal unobserved and passed through its 5th Battalion, already over. For the first thousand yards there was no opposition; fire then became heavy; but two lines of trenches south-west of Rumilly, known as the Rumilly Trenches, were taken, and the right reached the southern end of the village, the left hanging back as the 2nd Division was not yet up. An enemy counter-attack at 1.30 p.m. managed to establish two pockets in the Rumilly support trench, and bombing attacks failed to dislodge these. At 5 p.m. therefore, Br.-General Burnett ordered his reserve battalion to go forward after a barrage had been fired, which was to fall beyond the support trench from 6 to 6.30 p.m. To cross the canal in single file took the 2/4th Hampshire some time, and it lost the barrage; an attempt to advance beyond the support trench was stopped by heavy fire, so the Hampshire could do no more than reinforce the Duke of Wellington's.

In the 2nd Division, the left, the 6th Brigade (Br.-General F. G. Willan), was already across the canal with a footing in the Marcoing Line beyond it, whilst the right, the 99th Brigade (Br.-General A. E. McNamara), was still west of the canal. Major-General Pereira's orders were for the 6th Brigade to work down the Marcoing Line southward, and for the troops of the 99th to cross the canal at the extremities of its line and work inwards towards each other along the Marcoing Line. When this line had been taken, an advance to the high ground north of Rumilly was to be made. Zero hour was 5 a.m.

Under the 10-minute barrage fired by the XXXVI Brigade R.F.A. on the Marcoing Line, the 1/K.R.R.C. and 1/R. Berkshire of the 99th Brigade crossed the canal and

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hung on in spite of the foot bridges behind them being broken and the advance of reinforcements hindered. They eventually secured the Marcoing Line and at 2.30 p.m. advanced to the high ground north of Rumilly; but as the village had not been taken by the 62nd Division, a right defensive flank was formed.

All attempts of the 6th Brigade to gain possession of the Marcoing Line were at first met by fire at close range, but about 11 a.m. the enemy was seen to be retiring on both flanks. Machine guns were turned on him, the Marcoing Line rushed and the advance continued a thousand yards to the higher ground beyond the canal. Except that Rumilly was still in the hands of the Germans, the attack of the two divisions of the VI Corps had accomplished what had been asked of it and had secured a substantial bridgehead across the Schelde canal.

The XVII Corps also succeeded in crossing the canal and taking the Marcoing Line on its whole front. Lieut.-General Fergusson's plan was for the 63rd Division (Major-General C. A. Blacklock), on the right, to force the passage of the canal, and for the 57th Division (Major-General R. W. R. Barnes) to capture the Marcoing Line north of the la Folie Wood, lying west of the canal.

During the night the engineers of the 57th and 63rd Divisions, in spite of fire, had constructed pontoon bridges over the canal on the 63rd Division front, and at dawn the Drake and Hawke Battalions of the 189th Brigade, using the bridges and rushing the two locks, were over the canal, and soon after noon had mopped up the Marcoing Line and reached a position east of it. At 1.30 p.m. the 188th Brigade passed through, but the right encountering more opposition than the left, the brigade ended the day facing north-east towards Cambrai.

The part played by the 57th Division was small. A patrol of the 171st Brigade, acting in conjunction with a battalion of the 9th Canadian Brigade, worked down the Marcoing Line to the canal without much opposition, and at 2.30 p.m. Br.-General Longbourne was directed to send a battalion across the canal, as the 63rd Division was over it. It was 5.30 p.m. before a battalion began crossing, and then, owing to the swamps of the Schelde, and fire and darkness

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could not proceed very far. During the night the line was extended to the left to fill the space between the 63rd Division and the Canadian Corps

FIRST ARMY (Right Wing)[1]

In the First Army the Canadian Corps was already over the Marcoing Line, and up against the defences of Cambrai. To this corps General Horne issued the following order: "Canadian Corps will operate tomorrow [29th] so as to "secure crossings over the Canal de l'Escaut [Schelde canal], "north-east of Cambrai, and obtain eventual objectives "already detailed." This order Lieut.-General Sir A. Currie passed on to the 3rd, 4th and 1st Canadian Divisions which were in the line, adding instructions as to barrages and directing the 11th Division (on the left) to conform to the advance of the 1st Canadian Division, while Brutinel's Force was to be prepared to take advantage of any opening which might arise. The 7th Tank Battalion was ordered to allot four tanks each to the 1st and 4th Canadian Division, but later this order had to be cancelled as no machines were available. Zero hour was fixed for 6 a.m., but at 12.30 a.m. (29th) was postponed until 8 a.m.

The 3rd Canadian Division (Major-General F. O. W. Loomis) gave a line through Escaudoeuvres beyond the canal as objective, and the 9th and 7th Canadian Brigades (Br.-Generals D. M. Ormond and J. A. Clarke) continued their attack of the previous day; the 8th (Br.-General D. C. Draper), starting from behind the 7th, coming between it and the 9th as the attack progressed. Thus all three brigades were eventually in line, each covered by a brigade of Canadian field artillery.

Of the 9th Canadian Brigade one battalion was sent southward to assist the 57th Division to master its portion of the Marcoing Line, as we have seen. In the main advance, another, by hard fighting and skilful outflanking and helped by the barrage, broke the German defences on its front, taking a hundred prisoners, so that by 2 p.m. Petit Fontaine and St. Olle had been taken, when an advance was made nearly up to the canal.

[1] See Sketch 4.

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Owing to the difficulty of getting exact information as to the precise position of the front line, the barrage of the 8th Canadian Brigade came down about a thousand yards ahead of it, and seven hundred yards behind the enemy's front line; the two leading battalions therefore encountered uncut wire and intact machine-gun nests, opposition coming particularly from the Cambrai–Douai railway line, which there runs in a cutting, and it was not until about 3 p.m., after the 9th Canadian Brigade had mastered St. Olle, that, mixed with the 7th, an advance was made by the 8th as far as the Cambrai–Douai road.

At the beginning of the attack of the 7th Canadian Brigade, the German outposts rushed forward in small numbers and surrendered; two hundred yards farther on machine-gun fire opened on the brigade at close range, but by a turning movement 150 more prisoners were taken. The 8th Canadian Brigade now appearing on the flank, some mixture of units occurred, and about 9.30 a.m. the advance was held up; a counter-attack made towards noon against the open left flank was, however, defeated. A bombardment of the Cambrai–Douai railway cutting by 4·5-inch howitzers was then arranged, and took place at 12.50 p.m., but patrols pushed forward immediately afterwards were unable to make any progress.

The result of the day's operations of the 3rd Canadian Division was that, on the right, a section of the Marcoing Line had been secured and handed over to the 57th Division, and in the centre and left an advance of three-quarters of a mile to a mile had been made up to the outskirts of Cambrai and the road to Douai.

In the 4th Canadian Division (Major-General Sir D. Watson) the 12th Brigade (Lieut.-Colonel J. Kircaldy, acting, Br.-General J. H. MacBrien having been wounded on the previous day) was to pass through the 10th (Br.-General R. J. F. Hayter) at 8 a.m. As it was not possible for it to assemble close to the front in daylight, the jumping-off line was made a road 1,400 yards behind the front line, the initial barrage remaining stationary, covering the front line for twenty minutes to allow the leading troops to come up to it. The right was soon stopped by fire from the railway cutting, but the left, not having this enemy shelter on its immediate front (for the line turned northwards), captured

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Sancourt with 250 prisoners.[1] One small Canadian party of an officer and five men, by crawling up the dry bed of a stream, went on about three-quarters of a mile and entered Blécourt, and took 150 prisoners ; but the party was eventually forced to withdraw, bringing sixty of them with it. A fresh attack was arranged for 1.50 p.m. ; but small progress was made, the enemy counter-attacking several times, and, though Sancourt remained in its possession, at the close of the day—barring prisoners—the 4th Canadian Division had gained little else.

The 2nd Canadian Brigade (Lieut.-Colonel W. F. Gilson, acting), which was to make the attack of the 1st Canadian Division (Major-General A. C. Macdonell), learnt at 6 a.m. from its leading battalion, the 8th, that the barrage would come down on the line which the forward troops occupied, so they had to be withdrawn a couple of hundred yards in daylight, suffering many casualties. The line of the 1st Canadian Division was farther to the front than that of the 4th, so, in order that the troops of both might go forward together, the 2nd Canadian Brigade did not start until 8.36 a.m., the barrage remaining stationary until then. In spite of fire from the front and from both flanks, an advance of some distance was made, but then came to a standstill. The 8th Battalion, however, hung on till the afternoon, repelling several counter-attacks, but when it became quite evident that neither the 4th Canadian Division on the right, nor the British 11th Division on the left was coming up, the battalion was withdrawn to its position of the previous night.

Two attacks, made at 6 a.m. and 1 p.m. by the 11th Division, failed to gain any ground. No active operations were undertaken by either the XXII or VIII Corps, so that the advance of the 3rd Canadian Division remained the only success of the right wing of the First Army.

[1] Of the *22nd Division*. Its " Regt. No. 83 ", p. 142, states that its neighbour, holding the Sancourt sector, was completely destroyed, only " a small remnant of *II Battalion* and the regimental staff escaping ".

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CHAPTER IX

The Pursuit to the Haute Deule

The Fifth Army and the First Army (Left Wing)

27th September – 7th October

(Sketches 5, 11)

It remains to narrate the doings of the Fifth Army and the left wing of the First Army, which formed the link between the two offensive groups of Armies, the one engaged in Flanders and the other against the Hindenburg Position. Their action was definitely carried out in co-operation with the Second Army, on the left ; the Fifth Army, on that flank, facing the Vendin–La Bassée–Fromelles Line, will therefore be dealt with first.

After the series of minor operations described in the last volume[1] and from information obtained, it seemed evident that although the enemy had made all preparations for effecting withdrawal, he would not retire unless forced to do so either by direct action, or in consequence of events elsewhere ; for, so far, he had yielded ground only to strong pressure, and had tried to regain lost ground by counter-attack.

All arrangements were made on the British side to take prompt action should any indication be noticed that the enemy was about to withdraw, or was actually doing so. On the 28th September, in co-operation with the offensive of the Second Army in Flanders, all available artillery[2] was used to harass and inflict loss on the enemy by counter-battering and by shelling billets and headquarters. This fire was continued until the 30th, when each corps carried out minor operations or raids in order to discover the German dispositions. The left corps of the Fifth Army gained a small amount of ground,[3] but the right corps could make little headway, and was subjected to several counter-attacks. Prisoners captured in the La Bassée area stated that the preparations for withdrawal were not complete,

[1] See " 1918 " Vol. IV, Chapter XX.

[2] See Appendix II. 183 heavy guns and howitzers, besides the field brigades.

[3] See Sketch 11.

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that they thought it would take place in about a fortnight, and that instructions had been given to hold their position meantime at all costs.

THE FIFTH ARMY[1]

The Fifth Army, the XIII Corps having been withdrawn from the line on the 25th September and transferred to the Fourth Army, now consisted of the I Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. E. A. Holland)[2], transferred with its frontage from the First Army on the 15th September, on the right, and the XI Corps (Lieut.-General Sir R. Haking).[3] The former contained the 15th, 16th and 55th Divisions, and the latter the 19th (relieved by the 74th on the 1st/2nd October), the 59th and 61st, with the 47th Division in reserve, whilst the 2nd Portuguese Division had been brought into the Army area from the coast.[4]

On the 1st October, the 55th (1st West Lancashire) Division (Major-General Sir H. S. Jeudwine), by an advance of five hundred yards immediately north of the La Bassée canal, regained objectives reached on the previous day from which it had been forced by counter-attack to withdraw; and the 19th (Western) Division (Major-General G. D. Jeffreys) gained a small amount of ground near Aubers. Increased artillery activity was resumed.

The three following days, 2nd, 3rd and 4th, were marked by substantial progress, over flat, low-lying, nearly waterlogged country, the line of the Haute Deule forming the axis of a wide depression, and Vendin le Vieil–Fournes–Ennetières (Aubers ridge) the watershed between the Deule and the Lys.

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[1] G.O.C., Gen. Sir William Birdwood; M.G.G.S., Major-Gen. C. B. B. White; D.A. & Q.M.G., Major-Gen. P. O. Hambro; M.G.R.A., Major-Gen. C. C. van Straubenzee; C.E., Major-Gen. P. G. Grant.
For its reconstitution, see "1918" Vol. III, p. 194.

[2] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. G. V. Hordern; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. N. G. Anderson; C.R.A., Br.-Gen. H. C. Sheppard; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. F. G. Maunsell; C.E., Br.-Gen. H. W. Gordon.

[3] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. J. E. S. Brind; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. A. F. U. Green; C.R.A., Br.-Gen. S. F. Metcalfe; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. F. A. Twiss; C.E., Br.-Gen. H. J. M. Marshall.

[4] The 19th, 59th and 61st Divisions had been engaged in the battles of both March and April; the 15th, 16th and 47th in the former, and the 55th in the latter. The 74th came from Palestine.

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On the 2nd October information was given by a prisoner captured by the 15th (Scottish) Division (Major-General H. L. Reed) that the Germans had begun to retire at 4 a.m. to the eastern side of the Haute Deule canal, abandoning the Vendin–La Bassée–Fromelles position, and, in consequence, Lieut.-General Holland sent forward all his divisions. The 15th and 16th (Major-General A. B. Ritchie) did not meet with any serious opposition, but opposite the 55th, near La Bassée, the Germans fought stubbornly, and it was not until the early afternoon that the town was entered and 4 p.m. before patrols were pushing through it.

By night the 15th Division was up to the Vendin–La Bassée position, postponing the capture of Wingles, which was defended, until next day; the 16th (Irish) Division established posts in the Vendin–La Bassée position, on its front, which was found unoccupied, prisoners stating that a weak rear guard was holding the line Wingles–Salomé astride the La Bassée canal; the 55th Division, already well over the Vendin–La Bassée position, was on the line of the La Bassée–Fournes road, with patrols out towards Salomé, which by 2.45 a.m. (3rd) had established posts half a mile east of that village.

The XI Corps made similar progress. The 19th Division was actually in course of relief by the 74th Division, half of which was to be completed by 4.45 a.m.; some delay, therefore, took place in the start. Eventually the 230th Brigade of the 74th and the 56th Brigade of the 19th pushed forward. A patrol of the 19th Division mounted detachment came into contact with stronger German cavalry south-west of Fournes, and had to retire, but otherwise no fighting took place. At night the relief of the 19th Division was completed, and the line of the 74th Division ran, about two miles only from the starting line, from Lorgies (east of)–Halpgarbe, and was continued northward by the other divisions to Aubers (600 yards east of), to Fleurbaix, thence forward to Gris Pot, and back to join the Second Army south of Armentières.

The 59th (2nd North Midland) Division on the evening of the 1st October had given orders for two minor operations to be carried out next day in the centre of its front. At zero hour, 7.30 a.m., M Special Company R.E. discharged smoke and innocuous gas, and the 177th and 176th Brigades

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(Br.-Generals C. H. L. James and T. G. Cope) under creeping barrages, sent forward detachments which encountered little or no opposition. Interrogation of prisoners taken in a farm produced the same information as regards retirement as elsewhere, with the addition that the main body had retired at 4 a.m.; so at 9 a.m. Major-General N. M. Smyth ordered both brigades forward, and, unopposed except by a machine gun or two, by dusk they had reached a line six hundred yards east of Aubers.

The 61st (2nd South Midland) Division (Major-General F. J. Duncan) also had carried out a minor operation at 5.45 a.m. under a deep barrage. The enemy artillery made no reply, and the objective, some farm buildings, was easily taken with four Germans in it, who also gave information about the retirement. Patrols soon established touch with the enemy's rear guards, but resistance was slight, and the 184th and 182nd Brigades (Br.-Generals A. W. Pagan and W. K. Evans) reached the line, about a mile ahead, previously fixed as the first objective in a pursuit. At 10 a.m. divisional orders were received to continue onwards at once. Owing to the rough, broken nature of the ground and the wide wet ditches, progress was slow, although the hostile artillery was silent except for an occasional round from a long-range gun, and the few machine guns encountered at intervals were quickly suppressed.

At night some further reliefs took place: the 177th and 176th Brigades of the 59th Division were replaced by the 141st of the 47th Division and withdrawn into support, and the 178th Brigade of the 59th Division took over the front of the 182nd, the left sector of the 61st Division.

Progress was continued on the whole Army front on the 3rd October with little opposition. The 74th, 47th and 61st Divisions were now in the front line of the XI Corps, and the objective, the slight rise of ground overlooking Vendin le Vieil–Wingles–Billy–Hantay–Sainghin–Fournes–Radinghem–Bois Grenier, was reached. Aerial photographs had shown that considerable quantities of new wire had been erected west of Wicres and Fournes, but no stand was made on that line.

The pursuit was continued on the 4th October, but in the I Corps sector the advanced patrols were brought to a standstill by machine-gun fire from the line of the Haute

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Deule canal, and they found that the area near it south of Don, opposite the corps' left, was flooded, the water on the tow-path being knee deep. The patrols of the XI Corps were likewise stopped by heavy fire from the railway at Erquinghem le Sec and northwards to Mont Pindo, and they reported German artillery active. The line at night averaged a thousand yards short of the canal as far north as Don, and thence followed the western side of the railway line, being over it both near Wavrin and north of Mont Pindo.

In the area passed over concrete shelters had been blown up by the enemy and considerable damage done to the roads, but the railway lines had not been pulled up or seriously interfered with.

Only slight further gains of ground were made during the following days, and except for shelling and raids, no important action took place until the 14th October, although orders were issued for corps to follow and press the retreating enemy, and attempts were made to do so. The enemy's tactics of holding his line with machine guns, his scattered artillery dispositions, prisoners' statements and fires observed behind his lines all indicated that he would shortly continue his withdrawal.

Some changes took place in the composition of the Fifth Army. During the night of the 3rd/4th, the 61st Division had been relieved by the 59th, and it was on the 5th transferred to the Third Army.

On the 8th, the staff of the III Corps, the left of the Fourth Army, was transferred to the Fifth, and took over the frontage at the junction of the I and XI, held by the 55th and 74th Divisions, and on the 13th the 47th Division (XI Corps) was similarly transferred.

First Army (Left Wing)[1]

On the 27th September, on the day of the opening offensive of the Third Army and of the right wing of the First, the 20th Division (Major-General G. G. S. Carey) of the VIII

[1] See Sketch 5.

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Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Hunter-Weston),[1] the left wing of the First Army, had made a successful diversion attack against the Fresnoy sector, but, as it was holding a very wide frontage and the Drocourt–Quéant Line lay ahead, it took no further active part until the 2nd October, although every preparation was made to follow up the enemy. The VIII Corps by that time consisted of the 8th, 20th and 58th Divisions (the last having replaced the 24th Division, transferred on the 30th September to the Third Army). Its front extended from the Scarpe to the right of the Fifth Army north of Lens, as it had taken over the frontage of the left brigade of the 51st Division north of the Scarpe on the 1st October.

On the 2nd, as soon as it was discovered that the enemy had retired during the night, the 173rd and 174th Brigades (Br.-Generals C. E. Corkran and C. A. Maxwell) of the 58th (2nd/1st London) Division (Major-General F. W. Ramsay) pushed forward in conjunction with the right of the Fifth Army and found the German front position evacuated. The 175th Brigade (Br.-General H. W. Cobham), on the right, had orders not to advance as Lens on its front had recently been drenched with gas. Cité St. Auguste, on the 174th Brigade front, was taken after some opposition, and by night the Lens–Pont à Vendin railway, which there runs in a cutting forty to fifty feet deep, had been reached. After midnight both attacking brigades pushed on again without serious opposition to the Mericourt–Pont à Vendin line, to which the Fifth Army on the left had also come up. In the early morning reconnoitring patrols received heavy fire from the Annay Switch, and this position seemed to be for the moment the limit of the enemy retirement.

On the 3rd October Lens was found to be evacuated, and the 175th Brigade, being squeezed out owing to the direction of the divisional boundary, went into reserve. On this day the 20th Division, on the right of the 58th, came into action, and its 59th Brigade (Br.-General A. C. Baylay), against some opposition, reached the northern branch of the loop on the Méricourt–Lens railway.

On the 2nd and 3rd October, on the front of the 8th Division (Major-General W. C. G. Heneker), south of the 20th,

[1] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. C. F. Aspinall; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. A. A. McHardy; C.R.A., Br.-Gen. H. D. O. Ward; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. L. J. Chapman; C.E., Br.-Gen. H. G. Joly de Lotbinière.

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the enemy had maintained his position, as raiding parties and patrols verified; but on the 4th a short length of his front line immediately north of Oppy was taken and held, and touch gained with the right of the 20th Division. The 59th Brigade of the latter division on the same day joined up on the left of the 58th Division on the Méricourt–Lens railway, and its right closed up to Méricourt, but did not take the village, which lies on a plateau with a level field of fire all round it. The other brigades of the division, the 61st and 60th (Br.-Generals J. H. Cochrane and W. R. H. Dann) had made little progress on the 3rd, but on the 4th managed to reach and establish posts in the enemy's front line on the western side of Fresnoy and Acheville.

During the 5th, 6th and 7th, in the sectors of the 20th and 58th Divisions, active patrolling was carried out, but practically no change in the situation occurred, and during the nights of the 5th/6th and 6th/7th, the 12th Division (less artillery) from the III Corps relieved the 20th. On the 6th, the 8th Division, by bombing along trenches, cut off Oppy and captured its garrison. On the 7th, after two days' wire cutting, it undertook a small operation. Under a barrage fired by six brigades of field artillery and two of heavy,[1] and as usual by machine guns, the 23rd Brigade (Br.-General G. W. St. G. Grogan), advancing in the dark at 5 a.m., took, with few casualties, the Fresnes–Rouvroy Position between Biache St. Vaast and Fresnes, and in the evening pushed its outpost line well beyond to the marshes which cover Vitry en Artois on the west. Meantime the 25th and 24th Brigades (Br.-Generals Hon. R. Brand and R. O'H. Livesay) had exploited the success of the 23rd vigorously, had broken into and pushed along the Fresnes–Rouvroy Position as far north as Neuvireuil and joined up with the 12th Division south of Fresnoy.

With the renewed offensive of the Fourth and Third Armies which began on the 8th October, a new phase of operations opened for the First Army.

[1] Its own 2 brigades and 4 Army, and the XVI and XL Brigades R.G.A., under Br.-General J. W. F. Lamont. Two brigades of field artillery and an extra howitzer battery were placed in the XXII Corps area south of the Scarpe. As the latter corps line was ahead of the VIII's, the enemy position could be enfiladed, and Lieut.-General Godley lent a field artillery brigade and 4 batteries of heavy artillery to augment this fire.

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CHAPTER X

THE BATTLES OF THE HINDENBURG LINE (*continued*)

BATTLE OF THE ST. QUENTIN CANAL (*concluded*)

THE FOURTH ARMY

30TH SEPTEMBER – 2ND OCTOBER

(Sketches 12, 13)

To return to the operations of the Fourth Army,[1] engaged in the Hindenburg Position. At 11.45 p.m. on the 29th, the location of the forward troops of the two American divisions not being known, though aircraft reported that they had reached the Hindenburg Reserve (Beaurevoir) Position, the Fourth Army issued orders by telegram for a short advance next day which would secure the rest of the Hindenburg Line and the Hindenburg Support. General Rawlinson intended to renew the general advance as soon as the situation in the Australian–American Corps had been cleared up, and the breach in the Hindenburg Position widened. The directions to the corps were:

> the IX Corps, moving north-eastward, to get in touch with the American troops on its left, who were being relieved; to secure the whole of le Tronquoy tunnel defences, if not already captured (the capture was very nearly completed), with a view of allowing the French XV Corps to come up to that front;[2] to capture the high ground le Tronquoy–Sequehart–Preselles;[3] and to take Joncourt, farther north, in order to assist the advance of the Australian Corps on Estrées;
>
> the Australian–American Corps to get in touch with the American divisions believed to be in front of it; to capture Estrées and Folemprise Farm; to secure the rest—about a quarter—of the main Hindenburg Line

[1] See Sketch 12.

[2] The French 46th Division took over the front of the British 6th Division from Fayet to Gricourt on the night of the 29th/30th September. The French XV Corps (46th, 47th and 126th Divisions) was to cross the canal between Lesdins and le Tronquoy, outflank St. Quentin by the north and cover the right of the British Fourth Army.

[3] Actually the line reached on 1st October.

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as far as the northern entrance, near Vendhuille, of the canal tunnel, and the rest of the Hindenburg Support as far as the southern outskirts of Gouy; and to form a left defensive flank;

the American II Corps to withdraw its troops and concentrate as soon as relieved by the Australian Corps;

the III Corps to maintain its line, to take Vendhuille if opportunity occurred; and to help the operations of the Australians with all available artillery;

the XIII Corps and Cavalry Corps, both in reserve, to be prepared to move at short notice.

Early on the 30th Maréchal Foch paid a visit to Sir Douglas Haig at his advanced headquarters in his train at Gouy siding (south-west of Arras). After having learned his plans for pushing on all his Armies and his intention of directing the cavalry advance on Le Cateau, Maréchal Foch expressed his complete agreement. As the capture of Thorigny, on the Allied boundary, was important for the purpose of guarding the right of the IX Corps, the Maréchal sent orders by telephone to General Debeney (French First Army) to attack the village, which is on a long ridge that runs north-east to le Tronquoy and Sequehart, at the earliest opportunity, and to push his left (XV) corps, as previously arranged, across the St. Quentin canal at le Tronquoy.

Early on the morning of the 29th the commander of the IX Corps (Lieut.-General Sir W. Braithwaite) had issued a memorandum to his divisional commanders outlining the intended movements of the French XV Corps on his right and the measures to be taken to facilitate them: the 1st Division, on the right, was to advance and join hands with the 32nd Division, whose front at le Tronquoy was nearly two miles ahead of it: it was to leave outposts along the line Gricourt–Thorigny–le Tronquoy as flank guard until the French came up, when the division might take over part of the 32nd Division front as far north as Levergies: when the French XV Corps had crossed the canal, the 1st and 32nd Divisions would operate so as to reach Indian Hill (in the French area)—point 143, north of it—spur immediately north of Levergies, in order to aid the further French advance.

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Later in the day, at 8.45 p.m., the IX Corps issued orders for the 32nd Division to keep its left turned back in order to maintain touch with the Australian–American Corps near Etricourt ; and for the 46th Division, now in support of the 32nd, to assemble behind the latter's left flank. At 11.6 p.m. further corps orders followed, based on the Fourth Army's orders issued at 11.45 p.m., the gist of which had been earlier telegraphed to Lieut.-General Braithwaite. These modified the plan outlined in his memorandum of the morning. The first task of the IX Corps was now to be to extend its left so as to help the Australian–American Corps : for this purpose the 32nd Division, with the assistance of the III Tank Brigade and of the 46th Division, if necessary, would establish a flank from the northern edge of Joncourt back to Nauroy, where it would find the Australian Corps : the second task was for the right of the 32nd Division to secure le Tronquoy tunnel (which the 15/Highland L.I. of the 14th Brigade had nearly done), in order to help the operations of the 1st Division and the French XV Corps : the centre and left of the 32nd Division should, if possible, be simultaneously or subsequently pushed forward eastward to the line Sequehart–Preselles : the 1st Division would guard the right flank as before.

Before the receipt of these orders the 1st and 32nd Divisions had issued their orders, in much the same sense, for the continuation of the attack during the hours of darkness, although much more could not be expected of the troops during the night and even the position of the front line was not exactly known.

In the 1st Division, the 3rd Brigade, on the right, was to organize an attack along the ridge which, crossing the Thorigny–le Tronquoy ridge, extends through Rood Wood towards Lesdins, and, after 20 minutes' bombardment by the corps heavy artillery, to capture Thorigny village and Talana Hill, which lie on the ridge ;[1] the 1st Brigade was to co-operate in the low ground between the ridge and St. Quentin canal. Actually, the 3rd Brigade cleared up the situation at Rood Wood during the night. The advance of the two brigades was begun at 8 a.m. on the 30th, under a field

[1] On the 29th the XII Brigade R.G.A. (8-inch howitzers) and the 60-pdr. batteries of the XXI (Mobile) and LXXXIII (Mixed) Brigades R.G.A. had been moved up to new positions, as later in the day were the 498th and 499th Siege Batteries R.G.A.

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artillery barrage, with the support of six tanks of the 5th Battalion, of which four developed mechanical trouble, but the others reached the objective. Thorigny and Talana Hill, with three hundred prisoners, were captured without much difficulty by the 3rd Brigade, and by 8.35 the 1st Brigade had reached the Thorigny–Lehaucourt road. At 10 a.m. the advance was continued by the 1st Brigade, which filled the space between Talana Hill and the right of the 32nd Division at le Tronquoy.

The 32nd Division also gave orders for a forward position to be made good during the night. This was a line le Tronquoy wood–Levergies–Joncourt (point 500 south-east of).

The night was dark and cold, and great difficulty was experienced in locating the places of assembly, as all land marks, even roads, had been obliterated by the British fire of the previous days; the 96th Brigade, on the left, occupied, indeed, some trenches which were found at dawn to be within the enemy's lines, the garrison making off without fighting. No definite advance to the objective, however, took place till 8 a.m., when, with the aid of an artillery barrage and the support of eight whippet tanks of the 6th Battalion, it was secured.

The 14th Brigade, with which were the eight whippets, waiting for the French to cross the canal, pushed out patrols to keep touch with the enemy, and these came under severe fire. The 97th Brigade could make little progress owing to machine-gun fire; but at 6.30 p.m., after an artillery crash barrage, it attacked and took Levergies with four hundred prisoners. The 96th Brigade, which was to capture Joncourt, after the village had been bombarded from 1.30 p.m. to 2.30 p.m. by the corps artillery, did not gain much ground at first, as the barrage moved too quickly; it eventually reached the outskirts of the village and established connection between the 97th Brigade and the 5th Australian Division. Three whippets were sent to its assistance by the 14th Brigade; but they did not appear on the scene until 3.30 p.m., when two were hit and the third withdrew, as its engine was running badly. Preparations were taken in hand by the 32nd Division to continue the advance next day to the Sequehart—Preselles line.[1]

[1] For this see Sketch 13.

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The Australian Corps[1] had the very difficult task of clearing the remainder of the main Hindenburg Line and the Hindenburg Support, with the handicap that it could not be given more than limited artillery support, as it was almost certain that isolated American parties were holding out in advance of the general line, although their exact position was not known.[2] Owing to bad weather conditions, air co-operation was limited, and attempts to find the Americans still holding out and drop food for them proved unsuccessful. At 6 a.m. the 8th and 14th Brigades of the 5th Australian Division which had only the Hindenburg Support to deal with, and the 11th, 9th and 10th Brigades of the 3rd Australian Division, began operations against strong opposition. The 8th Brigade, in conjunction with the 32nd Division, made some headway and the 53rd and 55th Battalions of the 14th Brigade cleared the Hindenburg Support for twelve hundred yards up to the divisional boundary. The brigade repelled several counter-attacks, and then handed over its conquest to the 15th Brigade, so that it might continue the advance.[3]

The 3rd Australian Division had special difficulties, as Bony, on the knoll of a ridge, was full of machine guns, and the German batteries across the canal north of Vendhuille enfiladed the ground over which it had to pass. Eighteen tanks of the 13th and 16th Battalions were detailed to operate with the division, but only seven arrived at the starting-line, and these fifty minutes late. The 11th Brigade (less one battalion and plus two battalions of the 9th), under a barrage moving northwards, attacked up the main Hindenburg Line, two battalions working side by side, whilst the 10th attacked eastward between Bony and the northern entrance of the tunnel; the 9th Brigade (less two battalions and plus one of the 11th) kept connection between the two others. Such, however, was the enemy's fire that movement outside the trenches was out of the question,

[1] Lieut.-Gen. Sir J. Monash; B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. T. A. Blamey; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. R. A. Carruthers; B.G.R.A., Br.-Gen. W. A. Coxen; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. L. D. Fraser; C.E., Br.-Gen. C. H. Foott.

[2] The Australian Corps relied mainly on the 6-inch howitzer and 60-pdr. for counter-battery work, the heavier natures not being brought up until there was a pause in the attack.

[3] Private John Ryan, 55th Battalion, was awarded the V.C. When all officers and n.c.os. near had become casualties, he led the men nearest to him with determined bravery and initiative, and saved a dangerous situation.

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and the fighting reverted to the "bombing up" methods of trench warfare, with bayonets and hand-grenades as the weapons, covered by Lewis-gun fire, the Germans disputing the possession of every bay. The tanks moved farther east up the line of the tunnel, encountering little resistance except from Bony. By nightfall, after many hand-to-hand combats, the 11th Australian Brigade had cleared a thousand yards of the main Hindenburg Line and obtained a footing in the outskirts of Bony, where the tanks disposed of a number of machine-gun nests; but little other progress was achieved.

The III Corps (Lieut.-General Sir R. Butler) made an advance of about a thousand yards and secured Vendhuille as far as the canal which bisects it. The orders to the 18th and 12th Divisions were that they should hold on to the high ground overlooking Vendhuille which they had gained during the 29th, but when possible should push forward in order to obtain security in depth and better observation; in any case they were to follow up any retirement of the enemy. Reconnaissances on the morning of the 30th showed that Vendhuille had been evacuated by the Germans, but that they still held the eastern edge, and were in the main Hindenburg Line behind the village, with at least some 4·2-inch guns firing at close range from a wood nearby. British guns were shelling Vendhuille, and it was not until 10 a.m. that the patrols of the 55th and 54th Brigades were able to enter the village, and 1 p.m. before an order to advance was given. By 2.45 p.m. the 54th Brigade had moved into Vendhuille and begun mopping up. An hour later the brigade was directed by divisional headquarters not to fight for the bridge over the canal, but to establish an outpost line along the bank, and, if possible, send patrols across to locate the enemy, which was done after darkness fell. The 55th Brigade formed a right defensive flank along the southern side of Vendhuille and thence on the northern side of the Macquincourt valley to connect with the 3rd Australian Division. In the 12th Division, the 37th Brigade at first met with opposition, but it was overcome and the Germans retired across the canal, the western bank of which was then occupied. At night the 37th Brigade was relieved by the 53rd of the 18th Division from the corps reserve. The front of the III Corps was then

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held by the three brigades of the 18th Division, and the 12th Division was withdrawn preparatory to its transfer to the VIII Corps (First Army).

The French First Army had again done very little. One French division only, the 47th, next to the British, attacked at 5 p.m. and made small progress[1]; in fact it hardly went a thousand yards and did not reach the St. Quentin–Bellicourt road, 2½ miles from le Tronquoy. Elsewhere on the front of the French First Army only tiny advances, each on a 2,000-yard frontage, had been made. Sir Douglas Haig telegraphed to Maréchal Foch, through Lieut.-General Du Cane, chief British liaison officer at the Generalissimo's headquarters, pointing out that the IX Corps was attacking in the direction of Sequehart, and that the movement of the French XV Corps appeared to be very slow: Thorigny, which it should have attacked, had been taken by the IX Corps without the slightest difficulty: the French troops should come up to le Tronquoy with the least possible delay in order not only to protect the right of the IX Corps—which had been compelled to use the 1st Division to form a defensive flank—but also to operate on the eastern bank of the canal. He ended by asking that General Debeney—whose slowness had greatly hampered operations and was to continue to do so—should be urged to make his left wing act with vigour immediately.[2]

Except for the hanging back of General Debeney's Army, the general situation of the Fourth Army and the rest of the British Armies promised well for the further success on the 1st October. The more so as during the night the line of the German *Eighteenth Army* was withdrawn to (from north to south) Preselles–Sequehart–Lesdins–Harly (east of St. Quentin, which city was evacuated), and thence southward to Itancourt and Berthenicourt (on the Oise south-east of St. Quentin).[3]

[1] " ne progresse que faiblement ", F.O.A., vii (i), p. 90.

[2] This incident does not appear in F.O.A., nor is the action taken by Maréchal Foch known. The only effect of Sir Douglas Haig's communication was that Maréchal Foch altered the Allied boundary in French favour, bringing it from le Tronquoy nearly two miles southward to Lesdins (French); but this change was ignored by the French XV Corps.

[3] B.O.A., p. 549.

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During September[1] the British Armies in France had captured 66,300 prisoners, amongst them 1,500 officers, 700 guns and thousands of machine guns, of which the share of the Fourth Army was 547 officers, 20,981 other ranks, 245 guns and 7,232 machine guns. In the period 27th–30th September, 36 German divisions had been defeated with very heavy loss.[2]

It still remained to master the 4,000 yards of the Hindenburg Line in the Australian and III Corps sector of the Fourth Army and about 5,000 yards adjoining them in the Third Army, besides all of it in the French First Army sector. On the evening of the 30th September General Rawlinson issued orders for the IX and Australian Corps, the former keeping touch with the French First Army, to continue operations and make for the high ground from Sequehart to Joncourt, facing the Hindenburg Reserve (Beaurevoir Line), which was to be the objective, " with a view to secur- " ing a passage for the advance of the Cavalry Corps ".[3] He further directed certain reliefs :

> the XIII Corps headquarters (Lieut.-General Sir T. Morland), with the 25th, 50th and 66th Divisions, was to relieve the III Corps (Lieut.-General Sir R. Butler), containing the 12th and 18th Divisions, at noon on the 1st October; and, as soon as circumstances permitted, take over from the Australian Corps as far south as Mount St. Martin,[4] that is the frontage of its left division; the III Corps, by G.H.Q. orders, was to go to the Fifth Army; the American II Corps was ordered to concentrate south-east of Péronne, becoming Army reserve.

At the end of the orders, it was stated that the further object of the Fourth Army was to turn the enemy defences on the canal opposite the right of the Third Army by working northwards pivoting on the left, the IX Corps putting its

[1] For British casualties see Note I at end of Chapter XXXV.

[2] At midnight 30th September/1st October, the 24-hour clock was brought into use in the British Armies in France, it having been employed throughout by the French.

[3] This was in the IX Corps orders, but did not appear in Fourth Army orders until next day (1st October).

[4] See Sketch 13.

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weight on the left so as to assist the Australian Corps, and the Australians doing the same for the XIII Corps, but when the V Corps of the Third Army had crossed the canal the Fourth Army would resume its eastward advance.

The weather improved on the 1st October, and the R.A.F. was able to render much assistance, its squadrons being busy all day.

In the 32nd Division[1] a battalion of the 96th Brigade took part at 8 a.m. in an attack from the south on Joncourt at the junction of the IX and Australian Corps, whilst the 5th Australian Division, which had started operations from farther back at 6 a.m., assaulted it from the west. The village was entered by patrols without much opposition, the garrison having been withdrawn to the Beaurevoir Line during the night, and a line established east of it. A combined attack by the 32nd and the 5th Australian Divisions was then arranged for 4 p.m., should the Australians not have reached the Beaurevoir Line alone by that time. In the 32nd Division the corps heavy artillery[2] until 3 p.m. bombarded selected parts of the Beaurevoir Line, after which, until zero hour, it concentrated fire mainly on the objectives of each infantry brigade ; at Zero it lifted to selected targets on the flanks and in rear of the objectives until 4.40 p.m., after which hour it acted under special directions, so that its fire might not impede the infantry.

Advancing at 4 p.m., as arranged with the 5th Australian Division, under a good barrage with 10 per cent. smoke, the 5th/6th Royal Scots (14th Brigade) captured Sequehart with a hundred and fifty prisoners ; but, counter-attacked at 8.30 p.m. on two sides, it had to withdraw to a line west of the village to avoid being cut off. The attack of the 97th Brigade, made by the 1/5th Border Regiment, similarly resulted in Preselles being entered, but later evacuated. The main attack, that of the 96th Brigade, led by the 2/Manchester and backed up by 9 tanks, 8 of which reached

[1] See Sketch 12.

[2] During the night, in addition to the heavy artillery already in action, the XIV (8-inch howitzer), XXI (Mobile) and the LXXIX (Mixed) and LXXXIII (Mixed) Brigades had moved battery positions forward and in some cases east of the canal, and after dawn the XII (8-inch howitzer) crossed over. The task of supplying ammunition to the Fourth Army was not easy ; no less than 15 ammunition trains having to be cleared daily at railhead at Templeux le Guérard (5 miles west of Bellicourt).

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the objective (though 3 subsequently received direct hits), was entirely successful; it broke through thick wire into the Beaurevoir Line, and by 6.30 p.m. a stretch of about fourteen hundred yards from "Swiss Cottage"—which changed hands several times—southwards had been secured with over two hundred prisoners. Repeated counter-attacks were made during the night to turn the Manchester out of the Beaurevoir Line, but all were repelled. A squadron of the 20th Hussars, attached to the 32nd Division, tried in the evening to pass through the gap in the Beaurevoir Line, but was stopped by machine-gun fire from Ramicourt.

Before the joint attack on Joncourt at 8 a.m. the main operation of the 5th Australian Division had been launched in thick mist at 6 a.m., with the 8th, 14th (less 2 battalions) and 15th Brigades in line, assisted by ten whippets, which were of great help, but only four of them rallied after the action. By 7 a.m. the 8th Brigade had captured Mill Ridge, although artillery fire was fairly heavy; it then detached patrols to deal with Joncourt, as we have seen. But much farther than this the brigade could not go, and it established a line on the eastern slopes of Mill Ridge about a quarter of a mile from the Beaurevoir Line.

The 14th Australian Brigade had cleared Estrées soon after 8 a.m., taking some prisoners and a few guns. Finding the enemy's resistance weakening, it gradually occupied the broad spur of Mill Ridge on which Estrées is situated. The 15th Australian Brigade also made a good start, and soon after 7.30 a.m. had secured Folemprise Farm and Mint Copse, over two thousand yards ahead, respectively on the higher hammer-shaped end and on a north-west spur of Mill Ridge. Enemy shelling then became severe, and to avoid casualties the front line was, wherever possible, withdrawn behind the crest.

The struggle for Bony and Tunnel Hill north of it had been continued during the night by the 3rd Australian Division, and by midday on the 1st, the 10th and 11th Australian Brigades had captured Bony, the main Hindenburg Line north of it, and Tunnel Hill with The Knob at its northern end, which overlooks the canal; but Macquincourt Farm remained in German hands.

The 18th Division, now holding the whole short front of the III Corps (from midday the XIII Corps), could make no

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further progress into Vendhuille, and at night it was relieved by the 50th Division.

The Germans having retired, the French First Army advanced to the canal and entered St. Quentin.[1]

During the afternoon Sir Douglas Haig, with the C.G.S., visited Generals Byng and Rawlinson at the former's headquarters at Ligny Thilloy (2 miles S.S.W. of Bapaume). Both Army commanders assured him that the enemy had suffered very heavily and that it was merely a question of continuing pressure to ensure his completely breaking. They also agreed in saying that no further orders were necessary from G.H.Q. and that they both could carry on without difficulty.

General Rawlinson ordered the operations to be continued on the 2nd October:

> IX Corps "to exploit its success with cavalry and "infantry northwards towards Fresnoy le Grand–"Brancourt–Wiancourt, with a view of securing a "passage for the advance of the cavalry early to-"morrow morning (2nd).
>
> "Australian Corps to exploit towards Beaurevoir "and the railway between Beaurevoir and Gouy".

Both corps were to arrange for routes to be cleared for the passage of the Cavalry Corps.

The Cavalry Corps was not to be pushed beyond the canal line at Bellenglise and Bellicourt, where the heads of its columns were to be at 10 a.m., until the IX Corps had secured the high ground Fresnoy le Grand–Montbrehain–Wiancourt, or orders were given by the Fourth Army.

No progress worth mention was made on the Fourth Army front during the 2nd October; the Germans made several counter-attacks but the holding in the Beaurevoir line was not lost.

[1] F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 91: "A portion of the 47th Division seized le Tron-"quoy, thus establishing itself on the eastern bank". Le Tronquoy had been captured by the British 46th Division on the 29th.

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In the 32nd Division, the 14th Brigade, advancing at 6 a.m., took Sequehart, but was again forced out of it by a counter-attack at 9 a.m.; the 97th Brigade gained about two hundred yards towards Preselles, but was then forced back; a battalion of the 96th attacked Ramicourt, but gained no ground owing to heavy fire from the north. The discomfiture of the 32nd Division was possibly due to the inaction of the divisions on either side of it; the 46th Division, in support, was not, however, called upon for help. The 1st Division was inactive, having only to keep connection between the French First Army and the IX Corps, but it suffered considerably from shell fire. In consequence of the reliefs in the Australian Corps, the 50th Division of the XIII Corps, on the north, taking over the frontage of the 3rd Australian Division, and the 2nd Australian Division that of the 5th, no operations were undertaken by it on the 2nd.[1]

The cavalry divisions were ordered at 11.15 a.m. to return to their billets, and at 12.50 p.m. Fourth Army headquarters telegraphed to Advanced G.H.Q. that the IX Corps had been counter-attacked and driven back west of Sequehart: that it was evident that as long as the French First Army remained on the line of the canal all hostile pressure and any fresh reserves which the Germans could collect would be directed against the salient gained by the right wing of the IX Corps: that General Rawlinson had spoken to General Debeney on the telephone, and now suggested that the Commander-in-Chief should again approach Maréchal Foch to insist that the French First Army should come up into line on the right of the Fourth Army and capture Fontaine Uterte. The French left did attack, but was unable to make much progress.[2]

After discussion with G.H.Q., where it was held that the enemy reserves could not be substantial, General Rawlinson, during the afternoon, issued formal orders for a general

[1] The 3rd and 5th Australian Divisions went back to rest areas near Amiens.

[2] F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 92 says: "On 2nd October the attack was resumed at "the beginning of the morning. But the enemy reacted with artillery "and machine guns and multiplied his counter-attacks north of St. "Quentin. He seemed to have the intention of clinging to the eastern "bank of the canal . . . The 47th Division [next to British] failed in its "attempts to cross the canal. Its left, however, managed to progress and "enlarge its débouché east of le Tronquoy".

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attack by the IX Corps, the 2nd Australian Division and XIII Corps next day. Even a short pause was welcomed, not only by the infantry but also by the artillery, as the strain on the men and lorries (both motor and horsed) of the ammunition columns to ensure an adequate supply of shell was continuous, and their activities were often hampered by road control and abnormal traffic, and by the lorries being taken for other purposes, including moving heavy artillery.

NOTE

THE GERMANS DURING 30TH SEPTEMBER – 2ND OCTOBER

According to Schwarte (iii, p. 577); "At the beginning of "October O.H.L. was fully aware of the seriousness of the "situation, especially on the front of Boehn's Group of Armies "[centre about St. Quentin; from La Fère on the south to short "of Cambrai on the north]. Owing to lack of reserves, it was "considered that the only possible course was to yield ground "bit by bit and defend every yard, in the expectation that the "enemy's losses and German political proposals would gradually "cause the hostile attacks to weaken. The Hermann Position[1] "in rear was practically non-existent and therefore conditions "for the Germans would not be improved by a voluntary retire-"ment to it . . . . The limited mobility and great exhaustion "of the troops, the lack of previously prepared positions, the "enormous loss of army stores and local supplies which could "not be replaced might bring the army into an untenable "situation".

Behind the scenes at Berlin at 9 a.m. on the 2nd October the O.H.L. spokesman, Major von der Bussche, told the *Reichstag* party leaders that the war was lost: "that every twenty-four "hours can only make the situation worse and allow the enemy "to see clearly our present weakness". Ludendorff sent a message that the peace offer must at once be forwarded through Berne to Washington. "The army cannot wait twenty-four hours."

The Kaiser, the Vice-Chancellor and the army chiefs met in conference, Hindenburg using the words that "I expect a full-"dress attack inside eight days and can accept no responsibility "if a catastrophe or [correcting himself] at least the gravest "consequences ensue".

[1] See End-paper B.

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A Crown Council followed, at which Prince Max of Baden still objected to a request for an immediate armistice, as it would disclose Germany's weakness to the whole world. He asked that O.H.L. should put its demand in writing. Hindenburg thereupon handed him the following note.

> " O.H.L. maintains the demand made on Sunday the " 29th of September of this year for the immediate issue of " the peace offer to our enemies. . . . The German Army " still stands firm and victoriously repels all attacks. The " situation, however, is becoming more acute every day, and " may compel O.H.L. to take vital decisions.
>
> " In these circumstances, the proper course is to break off " the struggle in order to spare the German people and their " Allies useless sacrifices. Every day's delay costs the lives " of thousands of our brave soldiers ".

The Chancellor then put five questions in writing to Hindenburg.

> " 1. How much longer can the Army hold the enemy " beyond the frontiers ?
>
> " 2. Is the Supreme Command bound to expect a " military collapse, and, if so, within what period ? Would " such collapse mean the end of our power of military " resistance ?
>
> " 3. Is the military situation so critical that steps must be " at once taken to secure an armistice or peace ?
>
> " 4. In case the answer to 3 is in the affirmative, is the " Supreme Command aware that the initiation of a peace " step under the pressure of the military situation may " lead to the loss of German colonies and German territory, " in particular of Alsace-Lorraine and the purely Polish " districts of the Eastern provinces ?
>
> " 5. Does the Supreme Command agree to the despatch " of the enclosed draft ".

Ludendorff replied verbally, reiterating that " O.H.L. maintains " its demand for the immediate issue of the peace offer made on " Sunday the 29th September " ; and he evaded answering the questions.[1]

The request for an armistice, dated 4th October, was forwarded to Washington via Switzerland on the 5th.

The text ran :

> " The German Government requests the President of the " United States of America to take steps for the restoration " of peace, to notify all belligerents of this request, and to

[1] The draft of the proposed replies is in " Urkunden ", p. 540.

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" invite them to delegate plenipotentiaries for the purpose " of taking up negotiations. The German Government " accepts, as a basis for the peace negotiations, the programme " laid down by the President of the United States in his " message to Congress of January 8, 1918, and in his subse- " quent pronouncements, particularly in his address of " September 27 1918. In order to avoid further bloodshed " the German Government requests the President to bring " about the immediate conclusion of a general armistice " on land, on water, and in the air ".

General von Gallwitz (p. 399) records in his diary for the 30th September : " telephone conversation with the gentlemen " at O.H.L. in these days was not encouraging. Keller [his " Chief of the Staff] found that even Colonel Heye, who represented " the friendly element, was depressed ; Colonel Bauer mentioned " the nervousness which from time to time prevailed at O.H.L." He adds that the 5·9-inch howitzer and 4-inch gun batteries were to be reduced from 4 to 3 guns (p. 400).

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CHAPTER XI

Battle of the Canal du Nord (*concluded*)

30th September – 7th October

The First Army (Right Wing) and Third Army

(Sketches 4, 6)

The Third Army

Before continuing the operations of the Fourth Army, to which the principal rôle now fell, those of the Third Army and the right wing of the First Army will be described, in order that it may be clear why they were unable to assist the Fourth by a turning operation from the north as originally projected.

On the evening of the 29th General Byng had issued orders for the continuation of the operations as previously laid down, that is for an advance to the line of the Schelde (St. Quentin) canal.[1] Opposite the right wing (V and IV Corps) the enemy withdrew during the night of the 29th/30th to the eastern bank of the canal; the two corps followed him up, but found the line of the canal strongly held. The left wing (VI and XVII Corps) made little progress, the only success being the capture of Proville, a little more than a mile south of Cambrai. During the 30th September eight enemy divisions were identified on the front of the Third Army, but this was not the whole total.

The night of the 29th/30th was very dark, and heavy rain fell until about midnight, making the ground muddy and slippery.

The V Corps (Lieut.-General C. D. Shute) had ordered the 33rd and 21st Divisions to rest and reorganize, but to keep the enemy's trenches under bombardment, and to be prepared to follow up if there should be any sign of his retirement. It was not until 8 a.m. on the 30th that it was discovered the Germans had withdrawn. Both Villers

[1] See Sketch 6.

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Guislain and Gonnelieu were found evacuated, and the second objective of the 29th, a line of trenches on high ground with good observation over the valley of the Schelde, about two miles from the starting line and some three-quarters of a mile from the canal, was occupied without opposition. Here a line of defence was established and patrols were pushed forward to the canal, which is a fine waterway forty yards wide and navigable for large barges. The patrols found the western bank evacuated, the bridges broken and the enemy in position three or four hundred yards beyond the canal on ground commanding the western bank.

The IV Corps (Lieut.-General Sir M. Harper), being closer to the canal than the V Corps, ordered the 5th and New Zealand Divisions to secure the crossings, starting early—dawn was about 6 a.m.—and to form a defensive right flank if Gonnelieu was still in possession of the enemy. The 5th Division (Major-General J. Ponsonby) sent the 15th Brigade forward at 4 a.m. under a barrage fired by three brigades of field artillery. It had nearly two and a half miles to go to the canal. The advance caught the enemy in the act of withdrawing, and the brigade had no difficulty in reaching the first objective, a line about fifteen hundred yards from the canal in continuation of the trenches which the V Corps reached a little later. Patrols were sent on, but, like those of that corps, found the enemy in position on the far side of the canal, and they were unable to enter Banteux, a village on the western bank.

The New Zealand Division (Major-General Sir A. H. Russell) already only some thousand to two thousand yards from the canal, ordered its 2nd and 1st Brigades to seize the passages on its front. A patrol of the 2nd Brigade, sent out at 3 a.m., found the western bank evacuated and the bridge at Vaucelles destroyed. A company was at once sent forward, but all approaches to the site of the bridge were at once swept by fire, and it was not possible to attempt the crossing of the forty yards of water. Other patrols found two bridges north of Banteux in the 5th Division sector were passable for infantry and two platoons were sent across under a barrage; but as the enemy soon began to dribble back into Bantouzelle, opposite Banteux, they were withdrawn and an outpost line established on the western bank.

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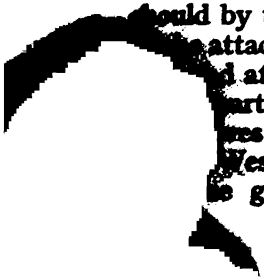
The 1st New Zealand Brigade planned to secure the canal and river crossings before dawn without an artillery barrage. The leading battalions were, however, to take a field battery with them. Brigade orders were sent out at 7.40 p.m. on the 29th, but the runners carrying them went astray in the dark —later even a battalion runner lost his way. The non-arrival of orders having been very properly reported, they were, at the risk of being over-heard, communicated by telephone at 11.15 p.m. The battalion commanders considered, in view of the darkness and rain, that the time now available was too short to allow the canal to be reached and crossed before daylight, and they asked for a barrage about dawn. This was arranged for 5.45 a.m., to be fired by three field brigades. Little opposition was offered on the western bank, and a company of the 2/Auckland succeeded in crossing by the bridge south of Crèvecoeur to the island between the canal and the river Schelde, here 24 feet wide with steep banks. In the face of accurate machine-gun fire, the company could do no more than maintain its hold on the island. Attempts to cross at Les Rues des Vignes failed, being made first too soon owing to a misunderstanding, without the barrage, and then too late, after it had passed on. A line along the western bank was then occupied, with the island position at Crèvecoeur still held.

The VI Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Haldane), already over the canal, made some gain of ground on the 30th September, but could not retain it. The 62nd and 2nd Divisions (Major-Generals Sir R. Whigham and C. E. Pereira) both advanced with distant objectives. In the sector of the former, the 185th Brigade, reinforced by a battalion of the 187th, passed through the line to attack at 6.30 a.m. without a barrage. The right wing managed to work forward a mile and reach the Crèvecoeur–Cambrai road, but the left found that Rumilly was strongly held and flanked from Mont sur l'Oeuvre on the north—which should by this time have been taken by the 2nd Division—



attack could make no further progress. At 12.30 p.m. attempt was made, this time with a barrage, when arties entered Rumilly, but could not maintain es there. On the right wing, the 1/5th Devonshire West Yorkshire, making good use of 40 German guns, captured by themselves, to defend their

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position, held on all day, although threatened by envelopment on the left and in spite of machine-gun fire from both Crèvecoeur and Rumilly on the right flank and on the left rear. At night, however, they were withdrawn, as the barrage for the division next day had to be arranged to fall behind their positions. They brought 150 prisoners with them.

In the 2nd Division the 5th Brigade was to attack through the 99th at 6 a.m. As a preliminary, the 23/Royal Fusiliers of the latter brigade assaulted Mont sur l'Oeuvre at 5 a.m., but failed under machine-gun fire. The later advance of the 5th Brigade did not take place, being dependent in this case on the capture of Rumilly by the 62nd Division.

The XVII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. Fergusson) ordered the 63rd Division (Major-General C. A. Blacklock) to advance south of Cambrai against Niergnies and Awoingt, and the 57th (Major-General R. W. R. Barnes) to clear the southern suburbs of Cambrai. At 6.30 a.m. the 190th Brigade, having passed through the 188th, was received with heavy machine-gun fire from front and flank, and could make no progress. A renewal of the advance at 1 p.m. in co-operation with the 57th Division fared no better.

The 171st Brigade of the 57th Division was to take Proville, whilst the 172nd, starting in rear of its right, was to clear the suburbs of Cambrai. Like the 190th Brigade, both were checked by machine-gun fire, but in the renewed attack at 1 p.m. the 2/6th King's (171st Brigade) captured Proville, the 1/R. Munster Fusiliers and 8/King's coming up on the right and left of it. It was evident that the enemy was making a desperate attempt to retain possession of Cambrai, and to hold on to what remained of the line of the Schelde canal. So far from the Third Army giving help by a turning movement to the Fourth Army, it was itself in need of such assistance.

THE FIRST ARMY (Right Wing)[1]

No great progress was made on this day by the right wing of the First Army, now in the angle of the Schelde and Sensée canals. Four German divisions were identified on the front

[1] See Sketch 4.

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of the Canadian and XVII Corps. General Horne's orders to secure crossings over the Schelde canal north of Cambrai and advance the front line to Morenchies–Aubencheul au Bac were repeated, so that the attack was the task of the Canadian Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Currie), to which the 11th Division was still attached. In the first phase, at 6 a.m., the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions were to advance north-eastwards about two miles, their objectives being bridgeheads over the canal at Ramillies and Eswars and the village of Cuvillers. In the second phase, probably about 10 a.m., the 1st Canadian and 11th Divisions (Major-General A. C. Macdonell and Br.-General O. de L'E. Winter, acting) were to come up on the left to Abancourt–Fressies. In each phase all the corps heavy artillery was to be employed. Three tanks each of the 7th Battalion were allotted to the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions.

The 7th Canadian Brigade, with three tanks, under a field artillery barrage, led the attack of the 3rd Canadian Division, with the high ground less than a mile west of Ramillies as its objective. That gained, it was to wheel to the right and capture the canal crossings at Pont d'Aire and Ramillies. On its right, the 9th Canadian Brigade going into reserve, the 8th was to watch Cambrai with one battalion, and with the other three keep touch with the 7th as it advanced. Covered by a good barrage fired by four field brigades,[1] after heavy fighting and many vicissitudes, the 7th Canadian Brigade, with one tank, took the southern end of Tilloy, which stands on a steep spur of the Ramillies ridge, fifty feet above the railway to the south; later it captured the greater part of the village. The left fought its way farther towards Blécourt, but could not maintain itself there, so that at night the line included all except the northern end of Tilloy and thence ran along the road to Sancourt, which village had been occupied on the previous day. Of the other two tanks, one broke down at the railway and the second was knocked out by a direct hit after going six hundred yards farther.

The 4th Canadian Brigade (Br.-General G. E. McGuaig), had as objective the high ground south of Blécourt–Cuvillers and the crossing at Eswars. Under a barrage fired by the III and IV Brigades, R.C.A., it reached the railway without

[1] IX, X, XIV and VIII (Army) R. Canadian Artillery

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difficulty, but then came under fire from the front and from Blécourt, left flank protection by means of smoke and a flank barrage proving of little avail. The advance was continued for several hundred yards, but in the end a retirement had to be made to the railway. The three tanks had advanced from Sancourt against Blécourt and two of them reached the village, knocking out several machine-gun posts, but only one tank rallied.

As the first phase of the plan had not been completed, the 1st Canadian and 11th Divisions did not attack, and the XXII and VIII Corps, on the left of the Canadian Corps, enjoyed a quiet day.

THE THIRD ARMY[1]

Operations were continued on the 1st October by the Third Army with the same objectives as before. On the flanks of the line little change occurred: on the right the V Corps was not yet prepared to cross the canal, and on the left, near Cambrai, the operations resulted in the capture of only a small length of trench on the extreme left of the corps front. But in the centre the IV Corps took Crèvecoeur, and the VI Corps, Rumilly and Mont sur l'Oeuvre. Thus the bridgehead on the Schelde canal south of Cambrai was increased both in depth and width.

In the IV Corps, the 111th Brigade, holding the front of the 37th Division, which had relieved the 5th Division, found that Banteux, on the western bank of the canal, had been evacuated, so an outpost line was established near the canal along the whole frontage of the division. During the night of the 30th September/1st October, the 1st New Zealand Brigade crossed the canal behind the front, near Masnières, in the VI Corps area and at 6 a.m., under a barrage fired by five brigades of field artillery,[2] attacked Crèvecoeur from the north-west over ground falling slightly towards the village. By 8 a.m. the 1/Wellington had captured the village and the 1/Auckland, on its left, had reached the Lesdains–Niergnies road abreast of its sister battalion.

[1] See Sketch 6.

[2] Those of the 37th and 42nd Divisions, and I Brigade New Zealand F.A.

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Half an hour later a counter-attack was made from Serannvillers, and the left of the brigade, being in the air, was driven back half a mile to the Crèvecoeur–Cambrai road; the possession of Crèvecoeur was maintained, however, and the new position held in spite of heavy casualties.

In the VI Corps Lieut.-General Haldane ordered as a first step that the 3rd Division (Major-General C. J. Deverell), passing through the 62nd at zero hour (6 a.m.), should capture Rumilly, and that the 2nd Division should reach the high ground north of the village, including Mont sur l'Oeuvre, lying on the slopes of the valley between the two objectives mentioned, in which runs the railway to Cambrai. The former division was supported by a barrage fired by six brigades of field artillery[1] and the latter by five.[2]

The 76th Brigade (3rd Division) and 5th Brigade (2nd Division) came under severe fire, and although the former secured the southern end of Rumilly, little other advantage was gained during the morning, and as soon as the barrage had passed the enemy began to trickle back to the village. A fresh attack by both divisions was arranged for 6.30 p.m., the 2/Suffolk in Rumilly being withdrawn so as to allow of a renewed bombardment of the village for thirty minutes. The attack was made by the same two brigades as before, with the 8th in addition on the right, so that it might advance from the south and cut the enemy's line of retreat from Rumilly. Made over a narrow No Man's Land in the failing light, the attack surprised the Germans and was entirely successful, over four hundred prisoners being taken with but slight casualties. A new line was established in a trench beyond Rumilly and Mont sur l'Oeuvre, in touch with the New Zealand Division on the right and the 63rd Division on the left.

The First Army (Right Wing)[3]

The Canadian Corps was the only part of the First Army actively engaged on the 1st October. Lieut.-General Currie employed all the four divisions which were in the front line,

[1] Those of the 3rd and 62nd Divisions and two Army.
[2] Those of the Guards and 2nd Divisions and XIV R.H.A.
[3] See Sketch 4.

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and a considerable amount of ground was gained, but on account of a heavy counter-attack could not all be retained.

The objectives were, for the 3rd Canadian Division, Pont d'Aire and Ramillies; for the 4th, Eswars; and for the 1st (which took over part of the front of the 4th), Blécourt, Cuvillers, Bantigny and Abancourt, whilst the 11th (British) Division was to protect the left flank by denying to the enemy the use for observation of the spur which runs from Epinoy northwards to the Sensée canal. The 2nd Canadian Division was to be prepared to follow and pass through the 3rd. Zero hour was 5 a.m.

Under a good barrage, with smoke to protect the right, the 9th Canadian Brigade advanced through the 7th, and by 7 a.m. the 43rd and 52nd Battalions had, after considerable casualties, reached the high ground on the Morenchies–Blécourt road. The 58th and 116th Battalions, in support, then came up, and an attempt was made to wheel right towards the Schelde canal. The four battalions now in line were brought to a stop, a thousand yards from their objective by gun and machine-gun fire, and, finding that a position on the forward slope leading down to the canal could not be held, they gradually made a retirement by small parties to the higher ground.

The experiences of the 11th Brigade of the 4th Canadian Division were almost similar. The 102nd Battalion reached the Morenchies–Blécourt road, where the 87th was to pass through, but after a long struggle under fire the battalions had to fall back to the road with the left bent back to face Blécourt, which the Germans had recaptured.

The objectives of the 1st Canadian Division were the four villages of Blécourt, Cuvillers, Bantigny and Abancourt, and the attack was made by its 3rd and 1st Brigades, under a barrage fired by six field artillery brigades.[1]

In spite of much opposition and of considerable casualties, the 13th Battalion (3rd Canadian Brigade) took Blécourt; the 16th and 14th Battalions then went through close up to the barrage, and by 7.45 a.m. the former was consolidating on the farther edge of Cuvillers, and very soon after the 14th Battalion captured Bantigny. So far all had gone well, but the three villages were in a valley running north-eastwards towards the junction of the Schelde and Sensée

[1] Its own two and those of the 39th and 57th Divisions.

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canals, overlooked by the spur on which Abancourt stands, and the 1st Canadian Brigade had not only failed to take this village and the ground to the south of it, but had been unable even to cross the Cambrai–Douai railway. As the light began to improve the 1st and 4th Battalions, which were leading, came under enfilade fire from the left, as the 11th Division after crossing the Cambrai–Douai road had been held up under fire by a thick belt of newly erected wire and was unable to guard their flank. About 8 a.m. an enemy aeroplane flew over and soon after two apparently abandoned batteries opened fire on Bantigny and Cuvillers; they were engaged by machine-gun and Lewis guns, but never completely silenced. About 9 a.m. enemy infantry and machine guns began to come forward in small parties and later made a convergent attack on the two captured villages.[1] About 10 a.m., the left flank being in the air and commanded from Abancourt, a retirement was made to a road just east of Blécourt. This village had been under enfilade fire since 9 a.m., and soon the enemy began to turn the new position from the north; he forced his way into Blécourt and compelled a further retirement to a road west of the village. As long as the enemy held the Abancourt ridge, an advance southwards past it had no chance of permanent success, and the heavy batteries were not in a position to help by neutralizing the defenders of the village.

The 11th Division, as already mentioned, had been checked by new wire, but it made a further effort. At 2 p.m. the 34th Brigade was brought up to the support of the 32nd which had made the original attack, and at 3.30 p.m. one of its battalions, the 5/Dorsetshire, under a barrage fired as before by four field artillery brigades[2], made an attack in the right sector next to the Canadian, but, hampered by wire and enfilade fire, it could not go very far. At 6.30 p.m., however, in the failing light, in conjunction with the 8/Northumberland Fusiliers (34th Brigade) on the left, the Dorsetshire drove the Germans off the railway and got abreast of the 1st Canadian Division. A defensive flank was formed facing north, but as there was a gap of over three-quarters of a mile between the left and the old front line, the situation was not satisfactory. The gap was not filled until the night

[1] This counter-attack was made by six battalions of the *220th* and *234th Divisions*.

[2] Two of the 11th Division and two Army.

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of the 2nd/3rd October. On the whole, an advance of nearly a mile had been made by the Canadian Corps without very much improving the position, except that the high ground east of Tilloy which had been won gave observation over the valley of the Schelde and the town of Cambrai. The Canadian Corps had now been fighting hard for five days,[1] so General Horne decided that no further important attack should be made for the present.

The operations of the right wing of the First Army during the next few days before the offensive of the 8th October can be dealt with shortly. On the 2nd October the 2nd Canadian Division, covering Tilloy, was attacked at 6.15 p.m. from the east and north ; both attacks were repelled by fire alone.

On the night of the 2nd/3rd October the 33rd Brigade of the 11th Division relieved the 2nd Canadian Brigade holding the line of the 1st Canadian Division, and this division then went into reserve. At midnight of the same night the 11/Manchester (34th Brigade) and a company of the 9/West Yorkshire (32nd Brigade), under a barrage, advanced and filled the gap in the divisional line south of Aubencheul au Bac. On the 5th Abancourt station was taken by a platoon of the 6/Lincolnshire (33rd Brigade).[2] A combined operation by the 11th Division and 56th Division (XXII Corps) had been planned with the object of clearing the enemy from the ground south of the Sensée canal held by him ; but during the night of the 6th/7th he evacuated Aubencheul au Bac and withdrew north of the canal, so that the objectives were occupied without opposition.

Between the opening of the attack on the 27th September and the 7th October inclusive, the losses of the right wing of the First Army had been :

	Officers	Other Ranks
Canadian Corps	707	12,913
XXII Corps	86	1,840

and its captures had been 8,010 prisoners, 200 guns and 714 machine guns.

[1] Br.-General A. H. Bell (6th Canadian Brigade) was among the wounded on 1st October. He was replaced by Br.-General A. Ross from command of the 28th Battalion.

[2] Summer Time came to an end on the night of the 5th/6th October.

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The Third Army[1]

In the period 2nd to 7th October no important change took place in the situation of the left wing (VI and XVII Corps) of the Third Army, as the Germans held on to the Cambrai sector; the VI Corps pushed its outpost line about four hundred yards to the front on to higher ground; the XVII Corps did the same, but had to relinquish the line attained. A good deal of firing went on and three infantry brigadiers were wounded: G. C. B. Paynter (172nd), F. C. Longbourne (171st) and W. L. Osborn (5th). On the 3rd October, as will be seen, the Fourth Army made a substantial advance, forming a left defensive flank which extended from the south of Vendhuille by the southern edge of le Catelet to south of Beaurevoir, and next day pushed this flank forward to Hargival Farm–La Pannerie (south), thus outflanking the Germans opposing the right wing of the Third Army (V and IV Corps) which was still held up by the enemy's defence of the Schelde canal. The enemy then abandoned the line of the canal and the strong defences of the Hindenburg Line and Hindenburg Support. Thus on the 5th the V and IV Corps were able to cross the canal, overrun the abandoned trenches and advance three miles to a line from 500 yards to a mile short of the Beaurevoir Line.

Before the attack of the 3rd October it had been arranged that the V Corps should support the XIII Corps, the left of the Fourth Army, and the 38th (Welsh) Division (Major-General T. A. Cubitt) had on that day been brought to the right, moving to Basse Boulogne (3 miles south-west of Vendhuille) in the Fourth Army area; on the morning of the 4th it reached Bony, and at night (4th/5th) its 115th Brigade (Br.-General H. D. De Pree) relieved the 50th Division (XIII Corps) in the defensive flank la Pannerie (south)–Hargival Farm. During the same night the Germans evacuated 5 miles of the line of the Schelde canal down to Vaucelles, which was in the Hindenburg Support. This retirement was discovered soon after dawn on the 5th October and the 33rd and 21st Divisions were able to cross the canal by extemporized means, for which material had been collected, without opposition, and, on further orders, had by 3 p.m. occupied the Hindenburg Support trenches two thousand yards ahead with outposts beyond

[1] See Sketch 6.

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them. Meantime, the 115th Brigade (38th Division), with the 50th Division on its right, and the 113th Brigade on its left, was pushing on north-eastward to Villers Outreaux. It encountered some opposition at Aubencheul au Bois and dug in west of the village for the night, whilst the 113th found the Bois du Mortho strongly held. During the night, however, Aubencheul aux Bois was found evacuated and a line was established on its eastern side. By this advance of the 38th Division, the 33rd was squeezed out and was withdrawn into corps reserve.

Directly it was known on the morning of the 5th that the enemy had abandoned the line of the Schelde canal, the engineers of all three divisions of the V Corps began to construct bridges over it, the first passable for artillery being ready by 3 p.m., and by night all the necessary artillery and transport could cross.

In the IV Corps the first sign of a withdrawal was the shelling by the enemy of Vaucelles and the Bois des Chêneaux, which he had just vacated. Patrols followed by battalions were then pushed across the canal by the 37th and New Zealand Divisions, lock gates and small rafts left behind by the Germans being made use of. Until the Beaurevoir Line was approached little opposition was encountered by the leading troops of the 111th, 2nd New Zealand and 3rd New Zealand Brigades. As this line could not be taken without a regular attack under a barrage, they dug in five hundred yards west of it. In the IV Corps sector also bridging was at once taken in hand, and by 6 p.m. wheeled traffic began to cross the canal.

On the 6th a further advance was made in the V Corps by the 113th and 64th Brigades, the latter even seizing and holding a projecting sector of the Beaurevoir Line north of the Bois de Mortho. No further change in the situation of the Third Army took place before the 8th October.

The casualties of the Third Army between the 4th and 30th September had been 1,518 officers and 35,367 other ranks. Those for the exact period 1st to 7th October cannot be ascertained from Army, corps or divisional records. The number of prisoners taken between 4th September and 7th October was 19,474.

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CHAPTER XII

Battle of the Beaurevoir Line

The Fourth Army

3rd–5th October

(Sketches 13, 14)

General Rawlinson's orders to the Fourth Army, issued on the afternoon of the 2nd October, for the attack against the Beaurevoir Line,[1] which drove at least nine divisions of the German *Second Army*[2] from the last trenches of the great Hindenburg System, did little more than indicate the objective. The prospect was encouraging, for prisoners stated that the back areas contained no enemy reserve troops, and that civilians were being evacuated from the country east of the line le Cateau–Valenciennes, that is the Hermann Position, the next prepared German position after the Hindenburg System.

The Beaurevoir Line, or rather Position, for it consisted of two trenches with concrete emplacements every two or three hundred yards and with machine-gun nests scattered in depth behind it, lay less than half a mile ahead of the Fourth Army on the right, its distance increasing to over two miles on the left; but the IX Corps still retained the holding gained in it by the 2/Manchester.

The objective was a line of low heights marked by Montbréhain and Beaurevoir, broken by gaps near Genève and Guisancourt; it was just beyond the enemy front line on the right, next the French, and some four thousand yards beyond it in the left centre, but then turned back northwards.

The IX and Australian Corps were to attack simultaneously at an hour to be fixed by Lieut.-Generals Braithwaite and Monash, and 6.5 a.m. was agreed upon; the XIII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir T. Morland) was to conform and establish a left defensive flank. The Cavalry Corps

[1] See Sketch 13.

[2] Six in the line and 3 *Eingreif* divisions were identified. The distribution of the Germans on the Western Front on 3rd October 1918 is given in Note III at end of Chapter.

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was to be prepared to march at one hour's notice after 9 a.m., and the XIII Corps to move the 25th Division forward at once in close support of the right of the 50th, with a view to its relieving the left of the Australian Corps next day if ordered to do so. A line of exploitation for the IX Corps only was defined – it included Mannequin Hill.

The French First Army (General Debeney)[1] had been ordered by General Pétain to attack on the right of the Fourth Army, with the important railway junction of Guise as its eventual objective. It did nothing: in the words of the French official account, "the First Army tried in vain to "advance to the south, the east and the north of St. "Quentin", and General Debeney ignored the order of Maréchal Foch, "at all costs to support the right of the "British Fourth Army".

The night of the 2nd/3rd October was dark and favourable for moving troops during its early hours[2]; towards dawn heavy fog formed, which, however, had lifted by 9 a.m.

In the IX Corps, the 46th Division, on the left, was to make the main attack after taking over about half the front of the 32nd Division: the ranks of this latter division were full of young soldiers who had been in action since the 29th September, had suffered heavy casualties and for some days had been without shelter and hot food. The attack had the support of 22 tanks and eight brigades of field artillery (four divisional and four Army), one of R.H.A. and the LXXXIII (Mixed), R.G.A., all under the C.R.A. of the 46th Division (Br.-General Sir S. H. Child). The 1st Division, on the right, was to keep connection with the French, and the 6th Division was to remain in reserve.

The Beaurevoir Line was won and crossed by the Fourth Army on its whole front; but the success attained was not as great as at first hoped, owing to the difficulties of co-operation, to the French First Army making no progress,[3] and, on the left, to the Third Army being held up at the St. Quentin canal and unable to help: one of the objects of the attack, indeed, was to assist the Third Army to cross.

[1] See Sketch 14.
[2] See Sketch 13.
[3] See Note I at end of Chapter.

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The country in front was gently undulating with occasional woods and copses and many sunken roads, but, except the very thick wire of the enemy's position and sunken roads, no obstacle to movement existed; the real resistance was offered not by the enemy position but by the large number of machine guns behind it, dug in in isolated pits or hidden in the villages; for instance, no less than two hundred were found in Sequehart.

The left being expected to go, and going, farthest, the story will be told from left to right.

The 137th and 139th Brigades led the attack of the 46th Division, from tapes laid by the 32nd Division, under a deep barrage, including machine guns, which moved forward six minutes after zero hour, and, although the time for preparation had been very brief, there was surprisingly little short shooting. Five of the nine horse and field artillery brigades were already in action, but the other four were some distance behind the St. Quentin canal, and moved forward in the dark, super imposing their fire on arrival on those of the brigades already in action. The heavy guns bombarded Sequehart, Ramicourt, Montbréhain and commanding features of the ground. Six tanks with the 137th Brigade and six with the 139th (one soon developed engine trouble) flattened lanes in the wire and the infantry followed them closely.

The 139th Brigade rushed the trenches of the Beaurevoir Line, and after overcoming some opposition from the machine gun posts beyond,[1] continued on to Ramicourt. There the two leading battalions diverged north and south to avoid the village; Lieut.-Colonel B. W. Vann, of the 6/Sherwood Foresters in support, at once led up his headquarters and one company to mop it up, and, with the help of the support companies of the other battalions, whilst the tanks cleared the outskirts, captured it with four hundred prisoners.[2] On the left one company drove the Germans out of Wiancourt, as the Australians had not reached it, also taking a few prisoners. Considerable resistance was now offered from the sunken roads and the railway, but the six tanks remaining did good service, one smashing up a nest of

[1] Sergeant W. H. Johnson, 5/Sherwood Foresters, was awarded the V.C. for great gallantry in attacking them.

[2] Lieut.-Colonel Vann was killed shortly after when leaving the village.

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sixteen machine guns, so that the western outskirts of Montbréhain were reached up to time. There four tanks were knocked out, one stuck in bad ground and the last one broke down. After a twenty-minute halt the barrage continued on and the advance was resumed. A tough struggle for Montbréhain ensued, but the village was cleared by 11.30 a.m., a haul of over a thousand prisoners being made, and a line on the eastern edge established. The enemy in front seemed to be in disorderly retreat, gun teams and infantry being seen streaming away. Fire came from the high ground north of the village, from Brancourt to the north-east and Doon Hill, but so promising did the situation appear that Major-General Boyd at 8 a.m. had asked the IX Corps for the 5th Cavalry Brigade. Its commander, Br.-General N. W. Haig, had brought it east of the canal at 9 a.m., in anticipation of orders which might be received at that hour, as arranged, but none appear to have reached him until nearly 11 a.m., and by the time he arrived at 46th Division headquarters the situation had changed. The brigade, with the corps cyclists, was put dismounted into the Beaurevoir Line to support the 137th Brigade and the 138th, the reserve brigade, which had arrived there about 9.30 a.m. Thus, no effect could be given to Sir Douglas Haig's special instructions to General Rawlinson that, directly Montbréhain and Beaurevoir had been captured and the 5th Cavalry Brigade was beyond the former town, he was to order the Cavalry Corps forward to secure the railway junctions of Busigny and Le Cateau and operate against the flanks and rear of the enemy opposing the Third and First Armies. It was not, however, until 6.45 p.m. that the Cavalry Corps, which had been standing ready since 9 a.m., was released and sent back to its bivouacs and billets west of the Canal du Nord.

No troops had appeared on either flank of the 139th Brigade; the Australians were no farther forward than Wiancourt, so towards midday a battalion of the 138th Brigade was sent to increase the force on this flank. On the right too a gap of a mile yawned, as the 137th Brigade had encountered much opposition.

After this brigade had passed over the Beaurevoir Line and the Sequehart–Ramicourt road, the right had been held up by machine-gun fire from concrete emplacements, and

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had lost many men before with the help of three tanks (two received direct hits but only one was disabled) they charged the guns and bayoneted the crews. Shortly after 8 a.m., however, the Sequehart–Montbréhain road on the lower slope of Mannequin Hill, was reached. Outposts were pushed forward to the crest, but, as the 32nd Division was still engaged around Sequehart, a right defensive flank was found necessary, and with reduced numbers the hill could not be retained, and a line along the Montbréhain road was consolidated. The left of the brigade met with some trouble at the wood west of Preselles, which had been cut down by the enemy and occupied in force. This was overcome with the help of one tank of the three on this flank (of these, one had developed engine trouble), and in this manner Neville's Cross, just south of Montbréhain, was reached; two enemy field guns, firing at point-blank range, preventing junction with the 139th Brigade, a party of Lewis gunners, thirty-two strong, was sent to deal with them and put them out of action. The left of the 137th Brigade then tried, but failed, to reach a mill on the north-western slopes of Doon Hill, whence an intense fire was harassing the inner flanks of the two brigades and keeping them apart. The third battalion of the 137th Brigade was brought up on the left, but the line established along the Sequehart–Montbréhain road could not be held beyond the point abreast of the northern end of Mannequin Hill, whence it ran north-westwards towards Ramicourt.

The first sign of enemy counter-attack on a large scale was noticed about 12.30 p.m., when troops which had apparently formed up in the vicinity of the Fontaine Uterte sunken road south of Montbréhain, advanced westward in waves, headed by scouts, some parties working their way into a quarry south of Montbréhain under heavy fire from the support companies of the 139th Brigade The barrage called for was late owing to the cutting of the telephone cables by fire, and the weight of infantry fire, owing to casualties, failed to stop the heavy waves of attackers.

The enemy was now behind the right flank of the 139th Brigade, and, as he also appeared to be moving towards the north of Montbréhain, Br.-General Harington ordered a withdrawal to a line covering Ramicourt, where the flanks of the 139th Brigade would be in touch with the 137th

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Brigade and the Australians. This retirement was successfully carried out. The Germans reoccupied Montbréhain, but all their attempts to advance farther were repelled. About 2 p.m. the 137th Brigade sent two companies to attack Doon Hill, whence fire swept the line of its right wing, but they were unsuccessful. At 6 p.m. the Germans launched another attack against this wing and forced it farther down the slopes of Mannequin Hill. This enemy movement was checked by the aid of artillery, and a counter-attack restored the situation. Fighting then ceased, both sides having come to the conclusion that the summit of Mannequin Hill could not be held.

On the right of the 46th Division, for the capture of Sequehart, which was to be shelled from 8 p.m. on the previous night until twenty minutes after Zero, the 32nd Division detailed the hard-worked 14th Brigade. It was to attack frontally, whilst a detachment of the 97th Brigade (Br.-General J. A. Tyler, the C.R.A., acting in command), at first accompanying the 46th Division on the left, turned towards Sequehart and rolled up the trench system from the north. The main body of the 97th, under a smoke screen, was to keep connection with the 46th Division, whilst on the right the 1st Brigade of the 1st Division filled the gap between the 14th Brigade and the French. Six tanks were allotted to the 32nd Division, but only four appeared.

The assault on Sequehart was made by the 1/Dorsetshire at 6.25 a.m. with two tanks, the 1/L. North Lancashire (1st Brigade) protecting the right, and a line east of the village was reached, but the weak companies were almost immediately driven back by a counter-attack. Reinforced by two companies of the 15/Highland L.I. and assisted by the left of the 1/L. North Lancashire, which took over the southern part of Sequehart, the reorganized Dorsetshire regained the lost ground. The 2/K.O.Y.L.I. of the 97th Brigade, with two tanks, in spite of opposition from field and machine guns was successful in working southwards and taking the place assigned to it on the left of the 14th Brigade, so that when the enemy, under a heavy barrage, attacked Sequehart about 6 p.m. he was everywhere driven back by rifle and machine-gun fire alone, leaving many dead and wounded on the field. At night the French 47th

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Division relieved the 1st Division, and Chardon Vert, south of Sequehart, became the international boundary.

The Australian Corps had now only the 2nd Australian Division (Major-General C. Rosenthal) in the line, with the 5th and 7th Brigades (Br.-Generals E. F. Martin and E. A. Wisdom) holding its front, and the 6th (Br.-General J. C. Robertson) in reserve, with the American II Corps (Major-General G. W. Read) available. It was, however, well covered by the artillery of the 1st, 2nd and 4th and 5th Australian Divisions, and by the 60-pdrs. and 6-inch howitzers of the corps artillery, under the C.R.A., Br.-General W. A. Coxen ; the heavy artillery of the XIII Corps, too, was to protect the left flank of the Australians by fire on the high ground east and north-east of Gouy. Eight Mark V tanks of the 13th Tank Battalion with eight whippets were allotted to the 5th Australian Brigade, and eight of the 8th and 16th Tank Battalions to the 7th. Owing to the difficulties of the approach march over trenches and shell holes, only six tanks for the 5th Brigade and three for the 7th arrived, and all were late, so that the Australians had to negotiate the wire of the Beaurevoir Line without their assistance. Of the whippets, five crossed this line, but all were put out of action by fire.

In each brigade the two leading battalions were to capture the Beaurevoir Line, when the two support battalions were to pass through and go to the final objective.

The barrage was good and the 18th and 19th Battalions of the 5th Australian Brigade, between 7.15 a.m. and 7.45 a.m. gained the support trench of the Beaurevoir Line, except a stretch of some five hundred yards immediately south of the Estrées–Genève road, the wire in front of which proved insurmountable. An endeavour to bomb up this piece of trench from the north and south proved ineffective and it was then subjected to thirty minutes' bombardment, after which it was attacked from the north and captured about 11.30 a.m. with two hundred prisoners and eighteen machine guns. Parts of the support battalions, the 17th and 20th, had meantime passed through on the flanks and down into the valley which runs from near Wiancourt to La Motte Farm, but the loss of time over the uncaptured stretch of trench delayed the whole right wing and produced a gap in the centre of the new advance, and stout resistance was

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encountered from La Motte Farm and from the ruins of a mill on a knoll south-west of Beaurevoir. With the aid of three tanks—three others had already been disabled by fire or burnt out—the farm was taken and by 2 p.m. all four battalions of the 5th Australian Brigade were aligned along the Wiancourt–La Motte Farm road, in touch, at last, with the 46th Division on the right.

The 25th and 27th Battalions of the 7th Australian Brigade had a thousand yards and more to go before reaching the Beaurevoir Line, and to cross a valley at the bottom of which is the " Torrens Canal ", a drainage channel running into the upper Schelde, passable by infantry. After dealing with the outposts, with the help of three tanks which had caught up (of which two returned in the evening) by 8 a.m. they had captured the enemy trenches. The 26th and 28th Battalions then passed through ; the former, working along the long Lormissel spur, actually got as far as and captured Bellevue Farm, west of Beaurevoir, whilst the 28th made its way up the northern branch of the Beaurevoir Line as far as the Gouy–Bellevue Farm road almost without opposition. But at 9.30 a.m., the advance was checked and, owing to heavy fire, the 28th could not gain the eastern slopes of Prospect Hill on the left, although the 50th Division had some outposts on it. Then the 26th had to abandon Bellevue Farm, as its exposed right flank was raked by fire from the higher ground to the north and from the mill south-west of Beaurevoir. The massing of enemy troops outside that village made it clear that a counter-attack was imminent, so it was judged expedient to withdraw the two battalions to the valley of the Torrens Canal.

In view of the opposition offered, Major-General Rosenthal had earlier reinforced the 7th Australian Brigade with one battalion of the 6th Australian Brigade, and he now sent up on the right the three remaining battalions to the 5th Australian Brigade. This combined force advanced at 6.30 p.m. under a barrage which had begun ten minutes earlier and went forward to the crest of the high ground, beyond the Wiancourt–La Motte Farm valley, as far to the left as a mill south of Beaurevoir, but the assault on Beaurevoir was postponed. In spite of the small agin of ground 1,192 prisoners, 163 machine guns and 11 field guns had been

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captured by the 2nd Australian Division at a cost of not more than a thousand casualties.

The XIII Corps[1] had only the 50th Division (Major-General H. C. Jackson) in the line, with the 25th and 66th in reserve, but it was extremely well supported by thirteen brigades of field artillery.[2]

The 151st Brigade (Br.-General R. E. Sugden) and the right wing of the 149th (Br.-General P. M. Robinson)—the left wing was on the west side of the St. Quentin canal—had to form a defensive flank for the Fourth Army by occupying a line from about Macquincourt Farm to Guisancourt Farm, seizing in the first place Prospect Hill, Gouy and Le Catelet. Considerable opposition was encountered by the 151st Brigade, particularly from Gouy, and the leading companies of the 6/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers suffered severe casualties, two of them being reduced to thirty rifles apiece. The battalion should have marched on Prospect Hill, but the fire from Gouy drew it to the left, when the support battalion, the 1/K.O.Y.L.I., was promptly led up by its commanding officer, Major G. de Hoghton, and Prospect Hill captured about 8 a.m. What remained of the Inniskilling and the 4/K.R.R.C. fought their way into Gouy and Le Catelet, some of the defenders running away, whilst others held out in the cellars and dug-outs. By 9 a.m. the 151st Brigade was in possession of the villages, and by 10.30 a.m. nearly all resistance had been overcome. Heavy enemy machine-gun and field-gun fire was, however, showered on the British line, and all except posts were withdrawn from the northern slopes of Prospect Hill.

The 2/R. Dublin Fusiliers and 13/Black Watch (right wing) of the 149th Brigade were held back by machine-gun fire from Hargival Farm between Le Catelet and Vendhuille, but after heavy artillery had been turned on to the farm, the Fusiliers, about 11.30 a.m., took the position between Le Catelet and Macquincourt Farm, rather short of the desired line. By this hour most of the defensive flank objective, that of the 50th Division, had been reached, but there were

[1] B.G.G.S., Br.-Gen. I. Stewart; D.A. & Q.M.G., Br.-Gen. S. W. Robinson; B.G.R.A., Br.-Gen. R. A. C. Wellesley; C.H.A., Br.-Gen. J. D. Sherer; C.E., Br.-Gen. C. A. Elliott.

[2] Those of the 12th, 18th and 74th Divisions, under Br.-Gen. T. O. Seagram of the 18th; that of the 25th, under Br.-Gen. K. J. Kincaid-Smith; and those of the 3rd Australian and 58th Divisions, with the III Australian (Army) Brigade, under Br.-Gen. H. W. Grimwade, of the first-named division.

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gaps in the line, one in particular on the western side of Le Catelet.

It was proposed to capture Hargival Farm on the left, but the plan was frustrated by a determined counter-attack about 2 p.m. from the north, from the direction of Aubencheul aux Bois by at least five battalions, and after confused fighting Le Catelet was lost, but the rest of the line retained. The 150th Brigade was brought up from reserve, and during the evening relieved the 151st.

A considerable tactical success had been won by the Fourth Army against particularly stout resistance, but the enemy had not fallen back in front of the Third Army, as had been hoped. This might indicate either that the enemy intended to stand fast, or that his troops had orders to fight to cover a further retirement; statements made by prisoners that charges were being laid under the railways and roads, and that bridges were being prepared for demolition seemed to favour the latter hypothesis. Strategically a good step had been taken in the execution of the plan for helping the Third Army across the St. Quentin canal; but to accelerate the enemy's withdrawal it was necessary to increase the Fourth Army's gains and capture Beaurevoir. As the 2nd Australian Division was not strong enough to renew the attack it was decided to hand over part of its frontage to the XIII Corps.

At 10.40 p.m. (3rd) the Fourth Army's orders for the next day's operations were sent out by telegram. They premised that the French XV Corps would attack with the support of the IX Corps artillery, and that arrangements for this and the change of boundary to Chardon Vert should be made direct between the two corps.

> The IX Corps was to seize Mannequin Hill and the ground immediately north of it, fixing its own zero hour. The Australian Corps was to establish itself on the high ground north-west of Montbréhain with its weight on the right, so as to help the left of the IX Corps; the new boundary with the XIII Corps, the Torrens Canal, was to come into effect at 6 a.m. on the 4th.

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The XIII Corps was to attack Beaurevoir and establish itself firmly on Prospect Hill, capture Guisancourt Farm, if opportunity offered, and, on the left flank, secure the high ground La Pannerie (south)—Hargival Farm, fixing its own zero hour in consultation with the Australian Corps.

A re-distribution of the artillery notified on the 1st October was to take effect at 6 a.m. on the 4th. This redistribution, whose main feature was that the Australian Corps transferred a number of batteries to the XIII Corps, resulted as follows :

	Divisional Artillery	Army Brigades	R.G.A. Brigades	Siege Batteries
IX Corps ..	1st, 6th, 32nd, 46th	2 R.H.A. 4 R.F.A.	8	4
Australian Corps	1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th Austr.	3 Austr.	7	4
XIII Corps *later*	18th, 25th 50th, 66th	6 R.F.A.	6	6

The IX Corps made no progress on the 4th October,[1] in spite of its frontage being reduced by the French XV Corps taking over a mile of it, and the 46th Division being reinforced by the 3rd Brigade[2] of the 1st Division, the Corps Cyclist Battalion, the 2nd Life Guards Machine-Gun Battalion and the 5th Cavalry Brigade as reserve. Throughout the day the enemy, by means of counter-attacks from Mannequin Hill exercised such pressure that any advance with tired troops was out of the question, and this hill remained in his hands. The French First Army did nothing to help : " the operations of the day obtained only limited " results ".[3] The map shows a tiny gain south of Chardon Vert.

It had been settled that the 6th Division should be in reserve with one brigade at the disposal of the 46th in emergency, and that the 1st and 32nd Divisions (less artillery)

[1] The second phase of the American-French offensive in the Argonne was begun on 4th October, lasting until the 30th. See Sketch 21.

[2] Br.-Gen. Sir W. A. I. Kay and his brigade-major were killed by a shell on this day whilst reconnoitring. Br.-General J. V. Campbell (137th Brigade, 46th Division) took over temporary command for 24 hours, being succeeded by Br.-General E. G. St. Aubyn.

[3] F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 96

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should be withdrawn into reserve, the 3rd, 14th and 97th Brigades rejoining them as soon as Major-General Boyd could release them.

During the night of the 4th/5th the 3rd Brigade relieved the 137th Brigade in the line, and at 11 p.m. Major-General Boyd was informed by telegram that it had been decided to replace his division and the 97th Brigade of the 32nd Division with it by the 6th Division on the night of the 5th/6th.

The attack in the reduced sector of the Australian Corps was carried out at 6 a.m. (4th), under a barrage, by the 6th Australian Brigade, which had to swing its left flank forward to connect at Genève (near Ponchaux) with the 25th Division (XIII Corps). The morning was very foggy, and by 8.30 a.m. the brigade had reached its objective; but as Genève, a collection of large farm buildings, and Ponchaux, the village immediately north of it, was still in enemy possession and endangered the left, a company was sent to form a defensive flank, and two hours later this company gained touch with the 25th Division, a quarter of a mile west of Genève. No further change in the situation of the Australians took place on the 4th October.

The 25th Division (Major-General J. R. E. Charles)[1] which on the 29th September had been in reserve near Albert, had been gradually moved forward, and during the night of the 3rd/4th October, its leading brigade, the 7th (Br.-General C. J. Hickie), had taken over the sector on the right of the 50th Division, vacated by part of the 2nd Australian Division.

The enemy's position in front of it was very strong: Beaurevoir stood partly on a hill which gave complete command over absolutely bare and exposed ground, while farm buildings, houses and the railway embankment near it provided concealed position for dozens of machine guns. The barrage was fired by six brigades of field artillery[2] and Beaurevoir itself was to be shelled until half an hour

[1] The cadre of this division after its losses in the Chemin des Dames battle of 27th May–6th June, 1918, leaving its artillery behind, had been reorganized in England and had returned to France on 15th September, when nine battalions from the 7th, 23rd and 48th Divisions in Italy, on their reduction from 12 to 9 infantry battalions, had joined it.

[2] Those of the 25th Division, two Army brigades, and two Australian Army brigades.

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after the infantry had reached the railway, when the village was to be mopped up from the north and south. The 20/Manchester, on the right of the 7th Brigade's attack, got into Ponchaux and Beaurevoir and held them until 1.10 p.m., repelling a counter-attack about midday. The severity of the casualties then led to a withdrawal over the railway, and the new line occupied was held for the rest of the day.

The 9/Devonshire, on the left of the 7th Brigade, was late, owing to brigade orders going astray during the relief and not being received until 5.15 a.m. The battalion lost the barrage and came under unhindered machine-gun fire; although it fought its way into Bellevue village, it had to evacuate the farm, and it could not get near Guisancourt Farm; at nightfall its line was but little in advance of its morning position. It was obvious that the 7th Brigade was not strong enough for the task, and Major-General Charles made his plans to repeat the attack next day with larger forces.

The 150th Brigade (Br.-General G. Rollo) of the 50th Division, with two battalions of the 149th Brigade attached, starting at 6 a.m., with a barrage fired by eleven field artillery brigades,[1] with four battalions in line, did better against very fierce enemy reaction. The 2/R. Munster Fusiliers fought its way into Le Catelet, and at the same time advancing from Gouy on the right, by 9.45 a.m. was at La Pannerie (south). On its left, the 3/Royal Fusiliers, which had gained some ground and mill buildings on the west of Le Catelet during the previous night, reached the high ground north of the town; but after losing 9 officers and 32 other ranks killed, and the 2/R. Dublin Fusiliers, on its left, being unable to progress, was forced to retire almost to the starting line, and La Pannerie had to be abandoned. The situation remained the same throughout the morning until the 2/Northumberland Fusiliers, in reserve, sent by Br.-General Rollo round the north of Le Catelet, captured, with two hundred and fifty prisoners, a strongpost which had materially helped to hold up the morning advance. At the same time, the 7/Wiltshire, the right of the brigade, holding the top of Prospect Hill, captured a trench on its northern slopes.

[1] Those of the 12th, 18th, 58th, 74th and 3rd Australian Divisions and the III Australian (Army) Brigade.

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To establish the Fourth Army flank more securely, Major-General Jackson decided to employ his third brigade in the evening. The high ground between La Pannerie (south) and Hargival was shelled for two hours, and a quarter of an hour before the bombardment ceased the infantry advanced in two portions, the 2/R. Munster Fusiliers with part of the 1/K.O.Y.L.I. (151st) on the right, and the 4/K.R.R.C. (151st) with the remnant of the 3/Royal Fusiliers, on the left, directed respectively towards La Pannerie and Hargival Farm. The operation was entirely successful, and, as has been seen, the posts were taken over by the 38th Division (Third Army), and all the units under the 150th Brigade, except the 7/Wiltshire on Prospect Hill, were then withdrawn.

As the IX Corps had made no progress on the 4th October and neither Montbréhain had been captured nor Beaurevoir retained, General Rawlinson issued orders for the 5th beginning :

> " the advance of the Fourth Army will be continued " and the enemy given no rest or time to reorganize. " The French are advancing on our right with objective, " Fontaine Uterte ".
>
> The IX Corps, conforming its movements to those of the Australians, was to seize the high ground south-east and south of Montbréhain, that is Mannequin and Doon Hills ;
>
> the Australian Corps (2nd Australian Division) was to capture Montbréhain, fixing zero hour for itself and the IX Corps ;
>
> the XIII Corps was to secure Beaurevoir, and the 38th Division (Third Army), which was to pass through its left, was to occupy the high ground near Guisancourt Farm and la Sablonnière east of it ;
>
> the Cavalry Corps was now to be ready at four-hours' notice, instead of one hour's notice.
>
> All corps were to push their artillery as far forward as possible, with a view to covering an advance eastward on the 6th.

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At 7 p.m. (4th) Sir Douglas Haig handed to his C.G.S. a minute outlining the orders for future operations which he wished to be issued to the First, Third and Fourth Armies and the Cavalry Corps. The formal orders were sent out early next day and are here reproduced in full. As introduction to them it may be stated that it was believed at G.H.Q. that in the country ahead no lines of defence could be seen, at least none had been reported; that no signs of devastation were visible; and that the ground, open and undulating, devoid of hedges and wire, was well suited for the employment of cavalry. The orders ran:

"1. The recent offensive operations of the Allies on "the Western Front have met with success at all points. "The enemy has lost heavily in men and material and "has been compelled to use his reserves piece-meal to "retain his line intact. He is now faced with the "necessity of maintaining a wide battle front with "depleted reserves and dispirited troops.

"Reports from the Fourth Army and the right of the "Third Army indicate that the enemy is weakening on "that front.

"The French First Army is attacking on the 6th "October, with objectives Fontaine Uterte and Croix "Fonsomme [2 miles east of Fontaine Uterte].

"2. The Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief intends "to strike the enemy a vigorous blow, and exploit "success with mounted troops before a new defensive "position can be organized. With this object in view, "the Third and Fourth Armies will deliver an attack "on a wide front on the 7th October. The general "objectives of Armies remain as stated in O.A.D. 923, "dated 22nd September.[1]

"3. The First Army[2] will demonstrate on its front "south of the river Sensée and will push forward strong "patrols between the rivers Sensée and Schelde. As "soon as the Third Army has reached the high ground "about Awoingt [2 miles south-east of Cambrai], the "First Army will co-operate by attacking and securing

[1] The general line to be reached was Bohain–Busigny–Le Cateau–Solesmes.

[2] See Sketch 4.

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" the passage of the Schelde at Ramillies [3 miles north-
" east of Cambrai], so that the latter Army may be in a
" position to carry out its rôle of protecting the left
" flank of the Third Army.

" 4. The operations of the Cavalry Corps will be
" conducted in accordance with the instructions laid
" down in O.A.D. 928, dated 29th September.[1] The
" Cavalry Corps commander will be the responsible
" authority for deciding when and where his command
" can push forward beyond the infantry.

" H. A. Lawrence, Lieut.-General,
" Chief of the General Staff ".

" Advanced G.H.Q.,
5th October 1918."

On the morning of the 5th the Chief of the General Staff, himself a cavalryman, attended a conference of the three Army commanders at General Rawlinson's headquarters, when, after the orders had been read, he explained further the Commander-in-Chief's views, which may be summarized as follows :

(*a*) The objective will be, as hitherto,[2] Wassigny–Le Cateau–Valenciennes (the Hermann Position).

(*b*) The Fourth Army should attack on as wide a front as possible ; its attack must be launched as soon as possible but will not begin until all is ready.

(*c*) The Cavalry Corps must be closed up so as to be ready to exploit the situation if it becomes suitable for cavalry action.

(*d*) The Third and First Armies will co-operate, and attack simultaneously, if a common date can be fixed to suit their arrangements.

On his return to the Commander-in-Chief's train, Lieut.-General Lawrence reported that the attack could be launched

[1] These directed the cavalry (*a*) to move in the general direction of Le Cateau and secure the railway junction there and at Busigny ; (*b*) to operate against the flank and rear of the enemy opposing the Third and Fourth Armies ; (*c*) to cut the enemy's communications about Valenciennes.

[2] See Frontispiece.

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on the 7th, as proposed, but the date was dependent on the Fourth Army having sufficient ammunition brought up, and next day it was postponed until the 8th.

On the 5th October, the German Kaiser issued an Order of the Day to his Army and Navy, informing them that he and his Allies were making a peace offer to the opposing Powers, giving the breakdown of the Macedonian front as the reason.[1]

•

In the operations of the 5th October[2] before the main attack the IX Corps had only a subsidiary rôle to play, so those of the 2nd Australian Division will be related first.

The 6th Australian Brigade formed up for the attack against Montbréhain about half a mile from the German trenches, with all its four battalions in line; but only the 21st and 24th Battalions on the right were to attack, with the 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion covering the right flank; the 18th Battalion (5th Brigade) and 27th Battalion (7th Brigade) were in reserve against counter-attack. Each of the three attacking units had four Mark V tanks of the 16th Tank Battalion allotted to it, and the barrage was fired by eight brigades of field artillery. Zero hour was 6.5 a.m., but the tanks were late at the starting point owing to a difficult approach march under heavy shelling, which included some gas, of the Australian area. The initial advance, in faint light, was made without them; but the eleven which came into action soon caught up with the infantry and did great execution in the streets of Montbréhain. Enfilade fire came from Mannequin and Doon Hills, which the IX Corps had been unable to reach, and the resistance offered was stubborn, no less than ten German regiments, which meant parts of at least four divisions, being identified from prisoners taken. On the north-western outskirts of the village a quarry held by about a hundred men with forty machine guns was captured by the 24th Battalion, but only

[1] The Battle of Monastir–Doiran had ended on 24th September, and the Bulgarian Government had asked for an armistice on the 27th.
[2] See Sketch 13.

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after a long and fierce struggle.[1] The reserve 18th and 27th Battalions were brought up and by 4 p.m. the whole of Montbréhain, with over six hundred unwounded prisoners and 150 machine guns, was in Australian hands, and a line was established beyond it. Only one tank received a direct hit; one struck a tree stump and three broke their tracks; eight eventually rallied.

By direction of Lieut.-General Braithwaite, Major-General Boyd (46th Division) was to take over the command of the reduced front of the IX Corps at 6 a.m. on the 5th. He had in the line the 14th, 97th and 3rd Brigades, and the IX Corps Cyclist Battalion. His task was to engage and neutralize the German troops on the high ground Mannequin Hill–Doon Hill, and so assist the attack of the Australians against Montbréhain. The field artillery was to barrage the ground and the heavy artillery to bombard Doon Hill and the mill on its western slopes; if possible, patrols of the 3rd Brigade were to occupy the two hills; if opposition was offered, the division was to remain on the line it held. Patrols soon ascertained that the high ground was still occupied and at zero hour the 1/Gloucestershire (3rd Brigade) attacked Mannequin Hill and took 26 prisoners and six machine guns, but could not hold the crest under the machine-gun fire which was rained on it. On the left, the Corps Cyclist Battalion sent patrols forward to fill the space between the Gloucestershire and the Australians, and they established contact with the latter at Neville's Cross south of Montbréhain. A counter-attack drove back all but the extreme left, so that very little ground was gained in the IX Corps area.

The task allotted to the XIII Corps on the left of the Australians, was to gain and consolidate the line Genève (where touch would be made with the Australians)—Ponchaux–la Sablonnière–Guisancourt Farm. Thus it included the capture of Beaurevoir. Lieut.-General Morland detailed the 25th Division, with eight tanks of the IV Tank Brigade, to carry it out with the artillery support of six field brigades as on the previous day, and the special co-operation of the 35th Squadron R.A.F. If the 50th Division,

[1] The success was largely due to 2/Lieut. G. M. Ingram, M.M., 24th Battalion, who for this and the capture of other posts received the V.C.

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on the left, had not already captured the high ground la Pannerie (south)–Hargival Farm, it was to do so (it had reached this line on the 4th after orders were drafted). Beaurevoir was to be bombarded by the heavy artillery for eighty minutes after zero hour (6 a.m.) and then mopped up. The eight tanks, though co-operating, were to act independently, the infantry not waiting for them; four were to clear Bellevue Farm, and then from the west or north help to clear Beaurevoir; the other four were to move along the valley of the Torrens Canal and enter Beaurevoir from the south.

The attack was delivered by the 7th and 74th Brigades. The first assault won a little ground, including, with the assistance of the tanks, Bellevue Farm and part of the Beaurevoir–Guisancourt Farm road; but when the fog began to clear all the gains could not be retained and the farm was lost. The bombardment seemed to have had little effect on Beaurevoir, every house on the south side, the cemetery and every coign of vantage appearing still to bristle with machine guns. The anti-tank defence of Beaurevoir consisted of rifles firing armour-piercing bullets, with very little field-gun fire; five tanks, which, creeping up the line of the Torrens Canal entered the village from the south, were able to do great execution among machine-gun crews; but as the infantry failed to arrive, they had to retire, losing one machine. Only on the extreme left was less resistance encountered, the 11/Sherwood Foresters reaching and capturing Guisancourt Farm, with 191 prisoners; but even this battalion had to fall back a little, as it was badly enfiladed from the right, although its left, as the 50th Division held Prospect Hill, was secure. By 9.30 a.m. the line along the railway was held to a point about thirteen hundred yards south-west of Guisancourt Farm, with a right flank thrown back to the Torrens Canal near Bellevue Farm. A battalion of the 75th Brigade, in reserve, was ordered to send two companies towards Bellevue Farm and two to reinforce the attackers of Guisancourt Farm; but owing to intense fire no change occurred.

Patrols of the 50th Division sent across the St. Quentin canal early on the 5th October found that the portion of Vendhuille on the eastern bank had been evacuated, so, in conjunction with the 38th Division (Third Army), the 149th Brigade moved eastward to a line through La Terrière.

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At 3 p.m. the 7/Wiltshire (150th Brigade) advanced from Prospect Hill, and the 150th Brigade established a line northwards to Vauxhall Quarry, and to the Army boundary south of Aubencheul aux Bois, which village was occupied by the 115th Brigade of the 38th Division. The patrols sent out during the night by the 150th Brigade found Guisancourt Farm still held by the enemy—it was not until early on the 6th that the 74th Brigade captured it.

At 3.15 p.m. orders had been issued by the 25th Division for the 75th and 7th Brigades to attack again in the evening at 6.40 p.m. They were to have the co-operation of every available machine gun, including the attached 100th Machine Gun Battalion, and a barrage which would open at 6.15 p.m. simultaneously with a re-bombardment of Beaurevoir by the heavy artillery. The Germans were surprised, and the 7th Brigade captured the cemetery, but could get no farther. The 1/5th Gloucestershire of the 75th Brigade, at 6.25 p.m., before the barrage lifted, climbed the railway embankment west of Beaurevoir and cleared away the machine-gunners on the other side; its two leading companies then passed through to the village, meeting with little opposition except from isolated machine guns and snipers' posts, which were dealt with quickly by the support company, and the battalion occupied a line beyond the village. The 1/8th Worcestershire, on the left, sent out a platoon which settled with the machine guns on the railway and in the pits and houses west of Beaurevoir by attacking them from flank and rear. Two companies of this battalion also entered the village and joined the Gloucestershire. But the attempts made by the 74th Brigade on their left to capture Guisancourt Farm failed. At 3 a.m. (6th) the 7th Brigade made another effort in the dark to gain the trenches between Ponchaux and Beaurevoir, but was unsuccessful; at 4.10 a.m., however, after ten minutes' bombardment, the 11/Sherwood Foresters (74th Brigade), with two companies of the 8/R. Warwickshire (75th) captured the farm, whilst the rest of the 74th Brigade pushed up the valley to the high ground north-west of la Sablonnière.

In the end, the 5th October, which brought to a close the Battle of the Beaurevoir Line, after a tough struggle had turned out to be a very satisfactory day for the Fourth Army, and nearly all the objectives indicated by General Rawlinson had been gained. In the three days' fighting

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twenty enemy divisions had been engaged against the twelve of the Fourth Army; the Germans "had thrown "the last rifleman, the last engineer and the last dismounted "cavalryman into the fight",[1] yet between the 29th September and the 5th October the Army had captured 14,664 prisoners, including 307 officers.

During the night of the 5th/6th, in the IX Corps sector, the 139th Brigade (46th Division) and the 16th Brigade (6th Division) relieved the 14th and 97th Brigade (32nd Division) and the 3rd Brigade (1st Division), and at 9.30 a.m. on the 6th the command of the sector passed from Major-General Boyd of the 46th Division to Major-General Marden of the 6th Division. The 46th Division had made itself famous by the forcing of the St. Quentin canal, but its ranks were sadly depleted and it required rest

The 2nd Australian Division, also, leaving some artillery behind, was relieved by the American 59th Brigade (30th Division). Montbréhain was, as it turned out, the last action of the Australian Corps, the other four divisions had already been withdrawn for rest, and there was no further occasion to employ these magnificent troops.

The Australians had taken part in checking the final stages of the German spring offensive; by their method of "peaceful penetration" in trench warfare,[2] they had struck terror in the hearts of the enemy troops; and in the action of Hamel, 4th July, they had shown how to conduct a large offensive operation. Since the 8th August they had been attacking without cessation and had captured 610 officers and 22,244 other ranks of thirty different German divisions, and 332 guns at a cost of 25,588 killed, wounded, missing and prisoners. Always formidable adversaries, they had continually improved in their methods, and in 1918 had been invariably successful. The staff work of the corps and its divisions was incontestably of the highest class, and the tasks set to troops were not only carried out by all ranks with

[1] B.O.A., p. 549.

[2] Originally called "prospecting", it meant cutting out opponent's posts without attracting attention, or nibbling at his line to find an opportunity. There was great rivalry between Australian battalions to secure as many prisoners as possible and establish a record. The index of the Australian Official History, 1918 volume, contains more than six inches of references to such incidents. The cumulative effect of them on the Germans was tremendous.

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innate military skill, tempered by training and experience, with reasoned audacity and peerless courage, but also with marked individual initiative and independence and the certainty that, whatever the odds, no enemy could resist them. Of their methods there are no better examples than Mont St. Quentin and Montbréhain, where a few hundred Australians drove the infantry of two, even three German divisions from their entrenched positions.

It does not in any way detract from their high merit as soldiers to point out that, with their rivals in the admiration of the Empire, the Canadian forces, they enjoyed certain advantages denied to the British troops. First, they retained the four-battalion infantry brigade, so inopportunely and ill-advisedly broken up by the British War Cabinet in January 1918, and thus did not suffer the dislocation, tactical and human, which ensued. Secondly, their men when wounded and sick were sent eventually to their own depôt and so back to their own units; the staffs at the British depôts did not take the trouble to sort convalescent reinforcements and, not understanding a soldier's love of his unit as his war home, and the craving for the society of old comrades, despatched these old soldiers to the first unit which required its ranks refilled. Thirdly, the Australian divisions were kept together as a corps; they had, in addition a team spirit, which Highlanders thrust into County battalions, or Londoners drafted into Welsh battalions, could not be expected to acquire; it was true esprit de corps enhanced by a very valuable particular patriotism. There might just as well have been London, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Scottish corps or, remembering an American idea, a "Rainbow corps." The days of a "mixture", in whose favour the Iron Duke once made a remark, seem, however, to be over. The co-operation between the divisions of a homogeneous corps, like the Canadian or Australian, was undoubtedly and invariably better than between divisions fortuitously thrown alongside each other in a corps, the name of whose general they did not know and the faces of whose staff officers they did not recognize. Currie and Monash were names well known to all, and more than respected. Equally efficient British corps commanders there were, but to the public and the Army their names were almost unknown in 1918, and they remain unknown, although their influence was far from being unfelt.

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NOTE I

The French Operations During 3rd–5th October[1]

(Sketch 14)

"During the 2nd and 3rd October the First Army vainly tried "to progress south, east and north of St. Quentin." On the latter day air reconnaissances reported "columns of German "infantry withdrawing from the front towards Guise [16 miles "east by north of St. Quentin]; a formidable block of infantry "and lorries in the bottle-neck at Mont d'Origny [5 miles south-"west of Guise]; and very abnormal railway traffic at the "stations of Guise, Mont d'Origny and Bohain [9 miles north-"west of Guise]".

"On the morning of the 4th Maréchal Foch impressed on the "G.O.C. of the G.A.R. [General Fayolle] the importance of the "First Army supporting the right of the British Fourth Army "at all costs."

General Pétain wrote to General Fayolle to the same effect, saying: "The situation on the front of the G.A.R. demands "action as powerful as possible on the left of the First Army. "It is there that the maximum of the force available should be "applied". This message was passed on to the First Army with the "indication" that north of St. Quentin was the sector in which it should attack.

General Debeney replied that he was reinforcing the XV Corps for the purpose, but "demanded to be reinforced with more "artillery".

"In spite of the signs of retirement noticed from the air, the "operation of the 4th October had but limited results. The "47th Division of the XV Corps had to fight hard to capture "Chardon Vert and some defences south of that place, and the "46th, which had occupied Morcourt, could not push any farther. "East and south of St. Quentin the enemy continued to resist."

"On the evening of the 4th, General Debeney ordered the "XV Corps, reinforced by the artillery of two divisions, to "attack Fontaine Uterte on the 6th . . . The XV Corps spent "the 5th in preparing for its effort next day."

On the 4th October Maréchal Foch found it necessary to comment (F.O.A. (ii), Annexe 137) to General Pétain on the small amount of assistance which the French Fourth Army (General Gouraud) had rendered in the previous eight days to the Americans on its right. "Yesterday, the 3rd October, in particular, showed a "battle which was not commanded, a battle which was not "pushed, a battle which was a disjointed affair (qui n'a pas

[1] F.O.A. vii (ii), pp. 94–6.

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" d'ensemble)." Some corps, he said, were inert, some made no attempt at manoeuvre, others exhausted themselves without result, and " it will not have escaped your attention that what I " have just said about the Fourth Army applies to several others ".

NOTE II

THE GERMANS DURING 3RD–5TH OCTOBER

All the German accounts of this period—the Official History of it, at the date of writing, has not been published—endeavour to minimize the defeat suffered on the 3rd October and slur over, if they mention, the loss of the Beaurevoir Line, the reserve and last line of the Hindenburg System; but they direct particular attention to their recapture of le Catelet. General Schwarte, who gives the best general account, claims that " it was not " until evening [4th October] that it became inevitable that the " main line of resistance should be withdrawn again to the west " edge of Beaurevoir–Montbréhain, after British cavalry which " approached had been repulsed with severe casualties [no such " incident occurred] ". He says nothing about the loss of the above villages and, omitting the events of the 5th–7th and the battle of the 8th, continues, " on the night of the 8th/9th a " reorganized position was taken up on the line Beauvois– " Montigny–Maretz–Bohain ".

The regimental histories claim " a victorious defence ", and attribute retirement to the failure of the divisions on either side and to the British appearing in rear: but one and all insist on the weakness of the German infantry without mention of the strength of the artillery and the great array of the machine gun battalions and other special units for which the infantry had been combed and recombed. The most interesting item is to be found in the history of the *2nd Guard Grenadier Regiment*. This states:

> " The full seriousness of the position became clear on the " 5th October, when the All-Highest addressed the following " Order of the Day to the German Army and Navy:
>
> " For months past the enemy has been striving against " your lines with powerful efforts, almost without a pause. " You have had to resist by fighting for weeks on end, " frequently without rest, and to show a front to a foe " vastly superior in numbers. Therein lies the immensity of " the task which has been given you and you are fulfilling it. " Troops from every German province are doing their duty

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" and, on foreign soil, are heroically defending the Fatherland. " My fleet is doing its utmost to neutralize the combined " enemy forces and indefatigably to support the Army in " its heavy fighting . . . . In the midst of the hardest " fighting comes the collapse of the Macedonian front. " Your front is unbroken and will remain so. In agreement " with my Allies I have decided to offer peace once more to " our enemies ; but we will only stretch out our hands for an " honourable peace."

On the 5th October Prince Max of Baden, on completion of the formation of his Cabinet, addressed the *Reichstag* in a speech in which he also announced that a step had been made towards peace. The Chancellor avoided anything which might give President Wilson an excuse to break off the correspondence, and left the impression, as the newspaper *Vorwaerts* said, " armistice on all fronts will immediately follow ". (Max ii, pp. 42–3.)

Throughout the month of October the German High Command was most anxious to avoid anything of the nature of a military defeat, as this might weaken the political position in the negotiations with President Wilson.

On the 30th September Hindenburg telegraphed to the Groups of Armies :

" Reinforcement by O.H.L. reserves can no longer be " reckoned on. Nevertheless an enemy break-through must " in all circumstances be prevented . . . . The important " thing is to gain time and inflict heavy losses on the enemy " . . . . The construction of the Lys–Hermann and Gutrun " [Hunding–Brunhild] Position as a position to be held for a " long period [*Dauerstellung*] is to be hastened by all possible " means." (Kuhl, p. 202.)

NOTE III

German Divisions on Western Front, 3rd October

	Miles	Divisions			German Armies
		Front Line	Army Reserve	Total	
Allied Offensive in Flanders : Belgian Army and British Second Army.	45	14 (3 fit)	3 (1 fit)	17	*Fourth Army*

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Quiet Sector : British Fifth Army.	20	9 (5 fit)	2 (1 fit)	11	*Sixth Army*
Offensive by British First, Third and Fourth Armies.	55	33 (6 fit)	19 (2 fit)	52	*Seventeenth*, *Second* and part of *Eighteenth*
Quiet Sector : French First, Tenth and Fifth Armies.	65	30 (6 fit)	10 (2 fit)	40	Part of *Eighteenth*, *Ninth*, *Seventh* and part of *First*
French and American Offensive in the Argonne : French Fourth and American First Armies.	70	32 (3 fit)	10 (6 fit)	42	Part of *First*, *Third* and *Fifth*, and part of *C Detachment*
Quiet Sector : American Second and French Eighth and Seventh Armies.	150	21 (3 fit)	11 (4 fit)	32	Part of *C Detachment*, *Nineteenth Army* and *A* and *B Detachments*.
Total		139	55	194	

NOTE IV

THE PRELIMINARIES OF THE ARMISTICE TERMS

The terms of an armistice with Germany had engaged the attention of the staff of the Supreme War Council for some time, and a study had been made of all the armistices concluded in the nineteenth century by the Great Powers, in order to ensure that nothing was forgotten. The first official mention of the subject occurs in a report of a conference at the French Foreign Office on the 6th October, when Mr. Lloyd George said that the recent speech of Prince Max of Baden indicated that peace overtures would shortly be made. M. Clemenceau thought that the time had arrived to formulate the conditions of an armistice, and Mr. Lloyd George then said that the best plan would be for the representatives of the Governments (1) to decide on general principles, and (2) to ask the military authorities to consider them from a practical point of view.

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The following draft conditions were agreed upon :

(1) Total evacuation by the enemy of France, Belgium, Luxembourg and Italy.
(2) The Germans to retire behind the Rhine into Germany.
(3) Alsace-Lorraine to be evacuated by German troops without occupation by the Allies.
(4) The same conditions as (3) to apply to the Trentino and Istria.
(5) Serbia and Montenegro to be evacuated by the enemy.
(6) Evacuation of the Caucasus
(7) Immediate steps to be taken for the evacuation of all territory belonging to Russia and Rumania before the war.
(8) Immediate cessation of submarine warfare.

It was also agreed that the Allied blockade should be raised, and that M. Clemenceau should convene a meeting of the naval and military representatives attached to the Supreme War Council.

On the 7th, at a re-assembly of the conference, M. Clemenceau said his idea was that the principles to adopt should be such that Germany should be asked to perform all that was necessary, but not more : that the Allies should not lay themselves open to the reproach of exposing thousands to be killed simply because the Supreme War Council would not accede to reasonable conditions : at the same time everything to guard against treachery should be done.

On the question, for what length of time the armistice should be granted, he thought three days was long enough : the men engaged in active fighting lived largely for victory, and if any long delay occurred their keenness for battle would disappear. It was agreed to refer the subject to the naval and military representatives.

On President Wilson being informed, he replied that the good faith of any discussion would manifestly depend upon the consent of the Central Powers immediately to withdraw their forces everywhere from invaded territory.

M. Clemenceau requested Maréchal Foch to prepare a note on the armistice terms, and the Generalissimo replied at length on the 9th October. He insisted particularly on two points :

(1) that the Germans and their allies must at once evacuate all occupied countries ;
(2) that the Allies must occupy the left bank of the Rhine, with bridgeheads on the right bank (Mordacq ii, pp. 278-9).

Maréchal Foch also requested the three commanders-in-chief to consider armistice terms and on the 28th October held a conference at which they gave their views. An account of the conference is given in the text later on.[1]

[1] See Chapter XXV.

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CHAPTER XIII

Battle of Cambrai 1918

8th October

The Fourth Army

(Sketches 14, 15)

For the Fourth Army the 6th and 7th October were days of preparation.[1] Early on the 6th Sir Douglas Haig sent his C.G.S. to General Rawlinson to impress upon him that the new attack should not be launched until all his divisions were quite ready. During this visit, after the G.O.C. XIII Corps had been taken into consultation, the 8th was fixed as the day. For this date the Third Army, which had undertaken no important operations since the 2nd October, was quite ready. The Commander-in-Chief himself, accompanied by Major-General Davidson (Operations Branch, General Staff), motored to Mouchy le Châtel for a conference with Maréchal Foch. The Generalissimo met him with a Paris morning newspaper in his hands, in which was printed in large type a Note addressed by Germany, Austria and Turkey to the President of the U.S.A. asking for an immediate armistice, and stating that they were ready to discuss conditions of peace on the basis of President Wilson's fourteen points. Maréchal Foch gave it as his opinion that the enemy should retire behind the Rhine before any negotiations were begun.

After Sir Douglas Haig had explained his plans the Maréchal expressed his entire approval; but when the British Commander-in-Chief said that if three fresh American divisions could be allotted to him he could push on rapidly to the important railway junction of Valenciennes (17 miles north-east of Cambrai), he replied that this was not feasible, as General Pershing did not wish to part with any of his forces—he was, in fact, forming the American Second Army on the right of the First, and it came into official existence on the 12th October.

[1] For instance, 48 hours were spent in bringing up six hundred lorry loads of ammunition for the XIII Corps alone.

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The problem was to appreciate what the enemy would do next: his front line divisions were more closely distributed to the mile on the front of the British Fourth, Third and First Armies than elsewhere on the Western Front, but his reserves were not sufficient for decisive counter-attack. It was estimated that on the front of the French First Army and the British Fourth Army, whose point of junction almost coincided with that of the German *Eighteenth* and *Second Armies* north of St. Quentin, the enemy reserves amounted to fourteen divisions, and on the front of the British Third Army the reserves of the German *Seventeenth Army* amounted to seven; all these reserve formations had been previously engaged and were in various states of exhaustion. On the other parts of the front the German reserves were small.[1] It was difficult to see how any more could be made available whilst the Allies continued to hammer on the whole front from the Argonne to Flanders. In addition to the general signs of retirement already mentioned, the Royal Air Force reported[2] that all enemy airfields west of the railway St. Quentin–Bohain–Busigny–Le Cateau were evacuated and that the great ammunition dumps at Fresnoy le Grand and Brancourt le Grand were empty. Escaped British prisoners stated that on their way from Landrecies (16 miles north-east of Bohain) they had passed transport and guns, including heavy guns, moving eastward, and that civilians were being cleared from the area as far back as Landrecies. On the other hand, good reasons existed for the enemy hanging on as long as he dared. The failure to hold the Hindenburg defences on the front of the British Fourth and Third Armies had forced on him a withdrawal on the front between Lens and Armentières; in the south near Reims a retirement on a wide frontage was in progress,[3] and in Flanders also preparations for an extensive retirement had been begun.[4] Unless the troops in the centre could prevent the advance of the French First and British Fourth and Third Armies for a sufficient time, these movements of retirement must be hastened and must inevitably end in collapse if not complete disaster. The chances were, therefore, that on the front of

[1] See Note III at end of Chapter XII for distribution of German divisions.

[2] See Sketch 15.

[3] O.H.L. had given orders on 30th September for the preliminary measures (Gallwitz, p. 398).

[4] See p. 87

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the three Allied Armies in the centre the enemy would stand to fight once more.

As soon as G.H.Q. orders of the 5th were received[1] General Rawlinson issued his own.[2] They announced that the attacks would be continued in co-operation with the French First Army on the right and the Third Army on the left with as objective a line (shown on a map) about three thousand yards ahead, but with a defensive right flank, including Mannequin and Doon Hills, as insurance against the French not moving; if the French advanced the right wing was to keep up with them. A general line of exploitation was indicated another three thousand yards beyond the objective. The orders then went into details of the barrage, allotted tanks and whippets, and directed the Cavalry Corps (of which one brigade was allotted to the IX Corps) to be ready to exploit success. The whippets were to push through the line independently as soon as the barrage lifted off the first objective, but not to go beyond the line of exploitation. Further artillery instructions were communicated next day: vigorous counter-battery work was to be begun at once and continued until zero hour (5.10 a.m. on the 8th), with shelling of localities and harassing fire, 6-inch guns being sited well forward to deal with distant targets. Counter-preparations and S.O.S. plans were to be put in force, especially for the defence of Montbréhain, Beaurevoir and Guisancourt Farm; on the day of the attack localities in the enemy's rear defensive system were to be kept under fire from Zero onwards by all guns and howitzers which could be spared; and the IX Corps was to arrange a deep barrage to protect the right flank of the American II Corps, now in the line again vice the Australian Corps.

On the 7th special instructions were sent out in regard to the exploitation movements of the cavalry in order to prevent the horsemen coming into the artillery zones of fire or being bombed from the air.

No advance was made by the IX Corps on either the 6th or 7th; but the American II Corps and XIII Corps slightly improved their positions during these days.

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[1] See pp. 172 *et seq.*
[2] Appendix VII.

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The front of the American corps was held by the 118th and 117th Infantry Regiments of the 59th Brigade (Br.-General L. D. Tyson), the line of the latter regiment being between five hundred and a thousand yards behind that of its neighbour. In an attack at 5.15 a.m. to rectify this, the 117th occupied the right sector of the desired line, but the centre and the left did not gain very much ground[1].

In the XIII Corps, on the 6th October, the 150th Brigade forced an entry into the Beaurevoir Line, finding shallow trenches and concrete emplacements, as had been the case farther south. Attempts to gain complete possession by bombing northwards up the trenches failed in the face of machine-gun fire, but on either side of the entry the front line of the brigade was advanced right up to the wire. At dawn on the 7th the 149th Brigade, which had relieved the 150th, tried to capture the Beaurevoir trenches and Villers Farm behind them; the operation failed, although two officers and 73 other ranks, with six machine guns were brought away as prisoners. A second attack, made with artillery support at 9 a.m., was also unsuccessful, and subsequently throughout the day concentrated enemy artillery and machine-gun fire prevented any movement in the open. The 151st Brigade was therefore brought up in the evening, when heavy rain between 7 and 10 p.m. aided concealment, and assembled on tapes laid out by the 7th Field Company R.E. At 1 a.m. (8th), under a barrage fired by the 290th and 291st Brigades R.F.A. (58th Division), the 1/K.O.Y.L.I. assaulted through the Beaurevoir Line, and took Villers Farm, inflicting heavy casualties. On the left the 115th Brigade (38th Division) of the Third Army simultaneously attacked Villers Outreaux and entered the outskirts but at dawn its position became untenable and it fell back.[2] Otherwise the night of the 7th/8th was comparatively quiet, and though the rain made the ground slippery, no great difficulty was experienced except in the XIII Corps in assembling the troops for the general attack at 5.10 a.m.

[1] The Australian Corps had left with the American II Corps the artillery of its 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Divisions, and the VI and XII Australian Army Brigades; eight (IX, XVIII, XLI, LI, LXVIII, LXXIII, LXXXI and XCIII) R.G.A. Brigades, four (the 222nd, 449th, 494th and 504th) Siege Batteries; the 146th, 216th, 238th Army Troops Companies R.E.; the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company; and a detachment of the Australian Electrical & Mechanical Company.

[2] See Chapter XIV.

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The front of the IX Corps (Lieut.-General Sir W. Braithwaite) was now held by the 6th Division (Major-General T. O. Marden) with the 16th Brigade (Br.-General H. A. Walker), 71st Brigade (Br.-General P. W. Brown), and the 139th Brigade (Br.-General J. Harington) of the 46th Division, attached on the right. The artillery allotted to the division was ten field and one R.H.A. brigades,[1] six R.G.A. brigades and five siege batteries.[2] Harassing fire had been carried out on the night of the 6th/7th, and during the 7th; and previous to Zero the heavies carried out counter-battery work and shelled selected important localities and after Zero continued intense counter-battery work and long-range harassing fire. When the objective was reached the heavy artillery was to cease fire until further orders, in any case lifting when the infantry was within eight hundred yards of the targets.[3] One field artillery brigade was directed to be prepared to follow up the advance on cessation of the original barrage.

The 5th Cavalry Brigade (Br.-General N. W. Haig) of the 2nd Cavalry Division, attached to the IX Corps, was to assemble at Lehaucourt (on the canal 3 miles behind the front line) after dusk on the 7th, and move so that it would clear the first objective immediately in rear of the infantry.

Major-General Marden had a difficult task. On his right was a deep valley running up between two long spurs, Cerise Wood and Fontaine Uterte being on the southern slopes, Sequehart and Mannequin Wood (in enemy hands) on the northern, and this valley was blocked at the enemy end by the Mericourt–Beauregard–Doon Hill ridge. From Mannequin Wood the ground rises northwards to another ridge which turns and joins the Mericourt ridge near Doon Hill. His other difficulty was caused by the French XV Corps, which did not intend to advance, if at all, until fifty minutes (6 a.m.) after the British; nor did it intend to advance as far, and thus the right of the 6th Division would be left exposed to

[1] Of the 6th Division (Br.-General E. F. Delaforce who was in command), 32nd (Br.-Gen. J. A. Tyler) and 46th (Br.-Gen. Sir S. Child), and four Army brigades.

[2] Under Br.-General G. B. Mackenzie: XXI, V, XII and XIV (8-inch howitzer); LXIX and XCVIII (9·2-inch howitzer) brigades, and 50th, 498th, 499th (6-inch gun), 1st R.M.A. and 80th (12-inch) siege batteries.

[3] For the advance, each division was allotted the equivalent of one mobile brigade R.G.A. Mobile and mixed brigades (less 8-inch and 9·2-inch howitzers) and one 6-inch gun battery would follow, as circumstances permitted, by order of the C.H.A.

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grave danger of counter-attack. Major-General Marden therefore decided to leave the Sequehart valley alone at first, to mask the Mericourt ridge at the eastern end of it by a screen of smoke shells, and confine his attack to the part of the ridge north of Mericourt village. Later the valley would be cleared by attacks from the north and west.

The 139th Brigade, with the Life Guards Machine Gun Battalion, was to hold the right of the line against counter-attack. At zero hour two platoons of the 1/Monmouthshire (Pioneers), attached to the brigade, made an attempt to put out of action some machine guns which from the right enfiladed the starting line of the 6th Division. This failed, as did another attempt made at 6 a.m. with four fresh platoons; but their action by absorbing enemy attention enabled troops of the 1/West Yorkshire (18th Brigade in reserve), which had been detailed with three whippets to clear the Mericourt valley, to work round, cut off and capture the machine gunners.

The 1/Shropshire L.I. of the 16th Brigade soon rushed Mannequin Hill and reached the sunken road connecting Fontaine Uterte and Montbréhain, 1,200 yards from the starting line, and sent back many prisoners, and then the 1/Buffs passed through to Beauregard, only just short of the first objective. The 71st Brigade in one burst went right through to Doon Hill; the 2/Sherwood Foresters, on the right, captured first one hundred and eighty prisoners, and finally five officers and 450 other ranks, with six field and 12 machine guns; but it found the crest of the hill under such heavy shell fire, particularly from two batteries, that, even when the nearest battery had got away under cover of the fire of the other, it was judged wise, as the final objective was so nearly attained, to go no farther. The 9/Norfolk, on the left, assisted by three whippets, whose action neutralized Brancourt though all were hit by armour-piercing bullets, advanced without meeting much resistance, and eventually managed to establish connection with the Americans at Brancourt station.

Meantime difficulties had occurred in the right area of the 16th Brigade, as Major-General Marden had foreseen. About 7.30 a.m. the 1/West Yorkshire reported that the French were not able to advance and that it was under severe enfilade fire from Cerise Wood in the French area, and that two of its whippets had been disabled. Soon after

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the French 47th Division reported that it had taken Cerise Wood, but this turned out to be a mistake.

An attack from the north by the 2/York & Lancaster, the reserve of the 16th Brigade, was arranged for 8.37 a.m., to take the enemy opposing the West Yorkshire in flank; but, through a misunderstanding and contradictory reports, the creeping barrage to cover the movement was not fired, and the battle became stationary. A little later Germans could be seen dribbling forward from the direction of Fresnoy le Grand, and towards 10 a.m. a counter-attack against the right of the 16th Brigade, which was badly enfiladed, appeared imminent. The 2/York & Lancaster formed a defensive flank just south of Beauregard, but was unable to progress towards Mericourt, and, away to the right rear the 1/West Yorkshire, which had already attacked Mannequin Wood twice, made a third unsuccessful attack against it at 10.45 a.m. Major-General Marden then arranged with the French 47th Division on his right for a combined attack at 1.20 p.m., after Cerise and Mannequin Woods had been shelled for thirty minutes and a smoke screen laid on the woods. Twelve Mark V tanks of the V Brigade had arrived near Preselles about 9 a.m.; but it was considered best not to employ them in the full daylight and to reserve them for action next day. The British part of the shelling was well carried out by the 168th Brigade R.F.A. and supported by very effective enfilade machine-gun fire. The 1/West Yorkshire first took Cerise Wood (in the French area), capturing three officers and 194 other ranks, and then secured Mannequin Wood with seven officers and 249 other ranks, the flight of the enemy being at first reported by onlookers near Sequehart as a counter-attack. The French XV Corps then came along, took Bellecourt Farm and advanced against Essigny le Petit and Fontaine Uterte, which line it finally reached.[1] Strong British patrols at once followed up the Germans, who covered their retreat by machine-gun fire, and Mericourt was taken by the 2/York & Lancaster. Between 9 and 10 p.m. the objective in the Mericourt sector had been reached, the line running from the junction with the French along the Fontaine Uterte–Mericourt road past the eastern side of Mericourt to east of Beauregard, with the

[1] Only the XV Corps of the French First Army attacked on this day; part of the XXXVI Corps helped to form a defensive flank. See Note at end of Chapter.

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1/West Yorkshire (18th Brigade), 2/York & Lancaster (16th) and 1/Buffs (16th) in line in that order. North of them the situation of the 6th Division remained unchanged.

The attack of the American 30th Division was made by the 59th Brigade with one battalion of the 120th Infantry (60th Brigade) attached, supported by the American 301st Tank Battalion (20 Mark V Tanks) and two companies (16 whippets) of the British 6th Tank Battalion, and by the greater part of the artillery of the Australian Corps, whose fire was distributed very much on the same system as that of the IX Corps. The 118th Infantry was disposed with two battalions in front line, the 117th with its three battalions in depth. Given a clear start on this occasion, unlike on the 29th September, the Americans moved onwards overcoming all resistance. Brancourt, on the right, gave some trouble, as it was full of machine guns, but with the help of the tanks of the 301st Battalion it was occupied by 11 a.m. The rest of the line had gained the first objective before 8 a.m., the whippets helping to deal with Vaux le Prêtre Farm. The advance was then continued to the line of exploitation, which was reached by 1.30 p.m. Here again the large village of Prémont proved troublesome, but after the whippets had made a demonstration in front of the village, the infantry were able to occupy it. Losses had been heavy. Of the Mark V tanks ten out of 20 rallied, and of the 16 whippets, 13; but the Americans took over fifteen hundred prisoners and 30 guns of four different divisions.[1]

The XIII Corps employed the 25th and 66th Divisions, but the 50th was warned to be ready to form a left defensive flank if the Third Army could not progress, which it was not called on to do. The assembly for attack was not carried out undisturbed or without loss; for the Germans had been alarmed by the night attacks on Villers Farm and on Villers Outreaux, and from soon after 1 a.m. until zero hour, 5.10 a.m., hostile shelling and machine-gun fire were fairly heavy, the enemy using tracer bullets in the latter, whilst aircraft from time to time dropped bombs on the assembling troops. Nevertheless, the assembly and deployment were completed and the advance was begun punctually. Except on the extreme left the enemy showed little disposition to fight, and often ran away before the attacking troops got

[1] Of the *Jäger, 20th, 21st* and *208th Divisions.*

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to close quarters; but, as usual, most of the machine-gun crews fired until the last moment.

The 25th Division whose frontage had been greatly diminished by the 66th Division coming into the line, detailed the 7th Brigade, which in its turn sent forward the 9/Devonshire, under a barrage fired by four field brigades and one brigade R.G.A.[1] Genève and Ponchaux were taken in the first few minutes and Bronx Farm rushed soon after, and by 7.20 a.m. the Devonshire, with the assistance of seven tanks of the 1st Battalion, which followed the infantry and dealt with centres of resistance, were on the first objective with a haul of nearly three hundred prisoners.

The 21/Manchester passed through at 8.10 a.m., at which hour the barrage moved on according to programme, and in an hour and a half, without the assistance of tanks, was on the objective. The 20/Manchester followed, detailing one company to keep touch with the Americans and garrison Bronx Farm and Sonia Wood on the boundary line; the company found that these localities and Genève required mopping up, and took sixty-six prisoners out of them. The right, too, of the battalion had to attack and capture Foal Copse, not yet reached by the Americans, whence machine-gun fire was proceeding. On the objective a right defensive flank was formed, but the Americans soon after arrived and filled the gap which had existed on the right.

At 1.35 p.m. the 25th Division ordered the 7th Brigade to advance its outposts and take March Copse. This was at once carried out, and after dark, in compliance with a 6.15 p.m. order, the brigade extended its front southward to the centre of Prémont in relief of the American left. The brigade had had a very successful day, capturing over six hundred prisoners, 12 field guns and howitzers at a cost of 39 killed and 157 wounded and missing.

The South African Brigade (Br.-General W. E. C. Tanner) and the 198th Brigade (Br.-General A. J. Hunter) made the attack of the reconstituted 66th Division (Major-General H. K. Bethell)[2] under a barrage provided by six

[1] 25th Division artillery, two Army brigades and the XXXVII (Mixed) Brigade R.G.A.

[2] After its heavy losses in the March offensive, the 66th Division (less its artillery) had been reduced to cadre till 18th September, when the 198th and 199th Brigades had been reconstituted with battalions drawn from Salonika and Palestine which had come back with a high percentage of malarial cases; the S. African Brigade was transferred from the 9th Division.

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field artillery brigades[1] and supported by eight tanks of the 1st Battalion, whilst from 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. No. 35 Squadron R.A.F. maintained a smoke screen west of Serain by means of 40-lb. phosphorus bombs. The 1 a.m. attack of the right division of the Third Army alongside[2] had woken up the enemy, who then began shelling the assembling battalions, an unlucky experience before the first action of a reconstituted division.

Stubborn resistance was experienced by the South African Brigade from the outset, mainly from machine guns, the enemy making full use of the positions afforded by sunken roads, old trenches, the Usigny ravine and la Sablonnière Farm. But soon after 7 a.m. both the leading battalions had reached the objective, capturing five field guns en route.

The 198th Brigade had much the same experience, but was much troubled by enfilade fire from the north, where Villers Outreaux was still in enemy possession. The 5/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers and 6/R. Dublin Fusiliers, notwithstanding, aided by five tanks, were on the objective by 7.30 a.m., having captured six field guns. With the co-operation of the 4/K.R.R.C. of the 50th Division, which advanced under its own barrage fired by the artillery of the 58th Division (Br.-General J. McC. Maxwell) they took Marliches Farm, south-east of Villers Outreaux, capturing two officers, 111 other ranks, one field gun and 49 machine guns. The K.R.R.C. was then withdrawn.[3] Owing to enemy fire, the Dublin Fusiliers could not remain in the farm, and, therefore, about 9 a.m., formed a defensive flank. Half an hour later the enemy made a counter-attack from the north ; but, with the help of two tanks, this was repelled, and during the next hour, though several times repeated, all his attempts met the same fate. Then the 38th Division (Third Army) came up and, helped by its attack on Villers Outreaux at 11.30 a.m., the Dublin Fusiliers recaptured Marliches Farm.

Meantime at 8.10 a.m. the 199th Brigade (Br.-General G. C. Williams) had passed through the South African Brigade with twelve whippets (of which eleven appeared

[1] 18th Division artillery and four Army Brigades, under Br.-General T. O. Seagram. The LXXVI (Mixed) Brigade R.G.A. was affiliated to the 66th Division.

[2] See Chapter XIV.

[3] The 50th Division, being squeezed out by the advance of the right of the Third Army, was withdrawn into reserve.

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and eight reached the line of exploitation). La Petite Folie Farm offered resistance, but with the assistance of two tanks, seventy of the hundred Germans in it were taken prisoner. The 5/Connaught Rangers and 9/Manchester then pressed on towards the large village of Serain, attacking it from north and south, whilst a company of the 18/King's attacked the western edge. The left of the 9/Manchester, by divisional order, pushed on beyond the line of exploitation to the edge of Elincourt, and the 198th Brigade took La Lampe Farm, on the boundary line. It was not until 7 p.m. that the last machine-gun post in Serain was overcome, when the line of the 199th Brigade was advanced a couple of hundred yards beyond the village and junction made with the 198th. The Connaught Rangers were then relieved by the 18/King's. Only seven rallied of the nineteen Mark V tanks with the XIII Corps.

Every effort was made by the higher commanders to pass the cavalry through to play havoc with the enemy's communications; but only a few patrols got much farther than the infantry front line. At 7 a.m. the 1st Cavalry Division (Major-General R. L. Mullens) was assembled in the valley west of Nauroy on the Le Cateau road, with the 3rd Cavalry Division (Major-General A. E. W. Harman), which was to support it, to the right in the Joncourt–Magny la Fosse valley. By 8.45 a.m. the three brigades of the 1st Division had moved forward to Genève, and about 9.50 a.m. the leading regiment, the 19th Hussars, tried to advance farther up the Le Cateau road between Prémont and Serain, but was stopped by machine-gun fire. Other sally ports north and south of these villages were tried equally in vain; but east of Brancourt two troops of the 19th Hussars actually got among some field guns with the sword. At 2.40 p.m. Lieut.-General Kavanagh telephoned to the Fourth Army that it was impossible to push the cavalry through without hard fighting, which the Commander-in-Chief did not wish; a few minutes after this he received a telegraph message from the Fourth Army, sent an hour earlier, directing him to push on; but at 4 p.m., as there seemed no prospect of cavalry action on a large scale, he withdrew the 3rd Cavalry Division to its morning place of assembly. Half an hour later he ordered the 1st Division back to an area round Beaurevoir; on its way there it was bombed from the air, and during the night

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several aeroplanes attacked both it and the 4th Guards Brigade and VII Brigade R.H.A., attached to the Cavalry Corps, causing some losses.

The 5th Cavalry Brigade, detached from the 2nd Cavalry Division to the IX Corps, with one section of E Battery and one section of the 5th Machine Gun Squadron, assembled at Magny la Fosse behind the 6th Division. The brigade was unable to carry out the manifold tasks of reconnaissance laid upon it. The head of its column was at Preselles by 7.45 a.m., and at 10 a.m. the advanced squadron of the Royal Scots Greys reported that two troops were almost on the line of exploitation east of the infantry on Doon Hill, and that a patrol was engaging the enemy half a mile south of Brancourt. A squadron of the 20th Hussars was sent towards the village, but this proved the limit of the advance, the enemy still being in sufficient force to stop cavalry—as an American said, "you can't have a cavalry charge "until you have captured the enemy's last machine gun". At 3.30 p.m. the leading regiments were withdrawn to Preselles.

The weather was unfavourable for the Royal Air Force, strong patrols flew over the Fourth Army front from 5.30 a.m. onwards, but could not carry out much bombing as the German pilots, helped by cloud masses at 2,000 feet and slightly superior climbing power, were able to interfere with their work. A feature of the day's fighting was the touch maintained with the advancing troops by patrols from zero hour until dusk, about 5.30 p.m.

At 12.45 p.m., in view of the favourable situation, General Rawlinson had issued orders for the advance to be continued beyond the line of exploitation to about the high ground west of Fresnoy le Grand, thence due northwards to near Mignon Wood and thence to Elincourt (inclusive); but until sufficient artillery could be brought forward no general advance appeared possible. In the IX Corps only a few of the heavy batteries were in the course of the day and following night got up to Levergies and Neville's Cross; in the XIII Corps, about 7.30 a.m., seven field artillery brigades were brought forward to just east of the day's starting line, and at 10.30 a.m. some of the heavy batteries of its XXIII, XXVII,

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LXXXVI Brigades were got up to nearly the same line. Later most of the field artillery was moved forward to cover the advance to the line of exploitation. Without fuller artillery support the infantry brigadiers were disinclined to go farther, and General Rawlinson postponed action until next day. He could be well content with the day's success. The Fourth Army had captured over four thousand prisoners from thirty infantry regiments of fourteen different divisions, besides men of three other formations[1] and 56 guns.

During the afternoon Sir Douglas Haig had held a conference at Third Army headquarters at Ligny Thilloy (1½ miles S.S.W. of Bapaume), which was attended by the G.O.C's of the First, Third and Fourth Armies. From the reports already received it appeared that eight thousand prisoners had already been sent to the cages, and that the resistance to the Fourth and the right wing of the Third Army was weak, so that both had made good progress, but that opposite the left of the latter Army the Germans were fighting well and had made several counter-attacks. The Commander-in-Chief, therefore, ordered that the operations should be continued next day by the Fourth and Third Armies on the lines already laid down; the First Army would attack the crossings over the Schelde about Ramillies and co-operate with the Third Army's advance on Awoingt and Cauroir.

NOTE

THE FRENCH ON 8TH OCTOBER

(Sketch 14)

On the 8th October the Argonne offensive was continued by the American First and French Fourth Armies.

In the French First Army "the XV and XXXVI Corps advanced at 6 a.m. in liaison with the British forces. In the XV Corps (46th and 47th Divisions), the 46th Division [on the right]

[1] *2nd Guard, Jäger, 8th, 20th, 21st, 21st Reserve, 24th, 30th, 34th, 38th, 84th, 119th, 121st, 204th, 221st* (6,000 machine-gunners only), *241st* (artillery only), and *2nd Cyclist Brigade*. Of these, the *Jäger, 24th* and *204th* and *Cyclists* were newly arrived. The whole of the *221st* and *241st* were, however, present, the former in the Mericourt valley and the *241st* near Montbréhain. The *Cyclists* came from Russia.

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" approached Essigny le Petit towards 10 a.m. in advance of the " 47th, held up in front of Bellecourt Farm [nothing is said about " its being held up by Cerise Wood, which was captured for it by " the British 6th Division]. At 11 a.m., General Fonclere, " learning that the British had taken Beauregard Farm and " Brancourt village and, perhaps, had entered Mericourt, ordered " an advance to the first objective, which was to be taken that " day at all costs : the 46th was to secure a line well to the east of " Essigny and the 47th, and, profiting by the success of the British " and making its principal effort on the left, envelope Fontaine " Uterte by the north. The attack was resumed between 1 p.m. " and 3 p.m. ; Bellecourt Farm was surrounded and surrendered " with five hundred prisoners. This important point d'appui " being secured, the 47th Division occupied Fontaine Uterte " without much resistance on the part of the enemy ; on the right, " the 46th Division was still in the environs of Essigny le Petit ".

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CHAPTER XIV

BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1918 (*concluded*)

8TH OCTOBER (*concluded*)

THE THIRD ARMY AND THE FIRST ARMY (RIGHT WING)

(Sketch 16)

In accordance with G.H.Q. Instructions of the 4th October,[1] General Byng on the same day issued orders to the Third Army[2] for the advance to be resumed on the 7th, altered next day to the 8th, with zero hour 4.30 a.m., that is forty minutes before that of the Fourth Army. The general objective to be reached was Le Cateau–Solesmes, in the Hermann Line over twenty miles away, and the first objectives allotted, some three miles ahead, were : V. Corps, Walincourt ; IV Corps, Esnes ; VI Corps, Wambaix and Igniel ; and XVII Corps, Niergnies and Cauroir, and it was to detach one division to maintain a left defensive flank to watch the western and southern exits of Cambrai. An account of the advance of the V and IV Corps over the Schelde canal and up to the Beaurevoir Line on the 6th and 7th October as a consequence of the successful breaking of the line by the Fourth Army has already been given ; but as the northern part of this line was still in enemy hands a preliminary operation was to be undertaken by the V Corps to capture it at 1 a.m. on the 8th in conjunction with the attack of the 50th Division (Fourth Army) against Villers Farm[3] in order that the right of the Third Army might go forward on the 8th at the same pace as the Fourth Army, which was already over the Beaurevoir Line.

The Canadian Corps of the First Army, on the left, was to co-operate on the 8th by means of artillery fire and vigorous patrolling, in order to deceive the enemy as to the limits of the attack and detain his reserves. As soon as the XVII Corps had captured the long ridge which runs from Niergnies to Awoingt and thence northwards, with Cauroir on its eastern slope, the Canadian Corps was to secure the

[1] See p. 172.
[2] See Sketch 16.
[4] See p. 188.

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passage of the Schelde canal at Ramillies (2 miles north of Cambrai) to protect the left flank of the XVII Corps.

The general instructions were to the effect that the enemy should be pressed with the greatest vigour where he was retiring and attacked where he offered resistance.

On the Third and First Army fronts the fighter squadrons of the Royal Air Force were chiefly employed in low-flying attacks; plentiful targets were found up to a distance of twelve miles from the line of battle, and much confusion was caused among the enemy columns by bombing.

The feature of the day was the use by the Germans on the front of the IV, VI and XVII Corps of tanks, some of them captured British machines which in one case obtained the benefit of surprise, as they were mistaken for our own.

The Third Army

The preliminary night attack of the V Corps (Lieut.-General C. D. Shute) was entrusted to the 38th (Welsh) and 21st Divisions (Major-Generals T. A. Cubitt and D. G. M. Campbell). Its object was to carry the Beaurevoir Line and advance to Villers Outreaux—Château des Angles—Hurtebise Wood on the eastern edge of a small plateau overlooking the valley of the Sargrenon stream, and to obtain touch with the left of the Fourth Army. Artillery was then to be brought forward and the advance continued at the same hour as the second bound of the Fourth Army, that is at 8 a.m.

In the 38th Division, the 115th and 113th Brigades (Br.-Generals H. D. De Pree and H. E. ap Rhys Pryce) made the 1 a.m. attack under a barrage fired by four brigades of field artillery, two brigades R.G.A. co-operating.[1] One battalion of the 115th Brigade was to go north and another south of Villers Outreaux, mopping up being carried out at dawn by the third battalion assisted by two tanks, and after dawn by two more of the eight tanks of the 11th Tank Battalion, allotted to the division, whilst two more were to mop up the trenches of the Beaurevoir Line. The 113th Brigade, on the left, was to advance up to the road which passes east of the Château des Angles.

[1] The artillery of the 33rd and 38th Divisions, under Br.-General J. E. Topping (38th Division), and XIII and XXII Brigades R.G.A.

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The attacking battalions of the 115th came upon strong wire covered by machine-gun fire, and failed to break into the Beaurevoir Line. The 113th encountered similar opposition, but entered the line on the flanks, although held up in the centre in the Bois de Mortho. Thus, no decisive progress was made by either brigade. About 5 a.m. as day was breaking, the 2/R. Welch Fusiliers, the third battalion of the 115th Brigade, arrived at the Beaurevoir Line in front of Villers Outreaux in order to mop up the village; it was received by a hail of bullets, but, as three tanks appeared and the commander of C Battery 122nd Brigade R.F.A., who was at the front with a telephone, promised and gave artillery assistance, Lieut.-Colonel C. C. Norman determined to attack. The tanks broke down the wire at the south-western corner, and the Fusiliers entered the defences and went right through and took the village. The other two battalions of the 115th Brigade were then able to advance on the right and left. The original failure of the leading brigades had caused Major-General Cubitt to postpone, until 11.30 a.m., the advance of the 114th Brigade (Br.-General T. R. C. Price), which should have passed through the first objective at 8 a.m.; but it was already involved in the fighting before this order was received. Coming up behind the 113th Brigade at 5 a.m., the 14th and 15/Welch, attacked in conjunction with the 14/R. Welch Fusiliers, the reserve of that brigade. The two tanks with them crushed a way through the wire, and, though both machines were then knocked out by shells, the infantry followed. After hard fighting in the Beaurevoir Line and in the maze of trenches beyond, the three battalions overcame all resistance, reached the objective and were ready with their left near the Château des Angles to continue the advance at 11.30 a.m. The third battalion of the 114th Brigade, the 13/Welch, also reached the position assigned to it with the 115th Brigade, south of Villers Outreaux.

During the morning the situation had been so obscure that the artillery which was to fire the barrage at 11.30 a.m. was not moved forward until 10 a.m., but it also was in position just in time.

In the 21st Division, the 1 a.m. attack was carried out by the 64th and 110th Brigades (Br.-Generals C. V. Edwards and H. R. Cumming), supported by three brigades of field and two

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of garrison artillery.[1] Six tanks of the 11th Battalion were allotted to the division: two were to be used after daylight to clear up the Château des Angles area, the others not until the second part of the attack at 5.15 a.m., when the first objective was to be extended northwards along a spur of the plateau to Hurtebise Farm.

The 64th Brigade carried the Beaurevoir Line without much difficulty, and by 2.30 a.m. the first objective north of the Château des Angles was reached. The château itself was taken, lost by counter-attack, retaken at 6 a.m., abandoned until enemy mines had been made harmless, and finally re-occupied.

The 110th Brigade also took the Beaurevoir Line without great trouble, reached the second objective overlooking the Sargrenon valley, and later extended its line to the north as planned. In this last operation a German battalion was cut off and completely destroyed.[2]

Without knowing that the attack of the 38th Division had been put off until 11.30 a.m. the 62nd Brigade (Br.-General G. H. Gater), with six tanks, at 8 a.m. passed through the 21st Division line, advanced across the valley of the Sargrenon under a barrage, with Walincourt and the long spur on whose slopes the village lies as objective. Opposed in front and enfiladed from the south, the brigade made little progress during the morning. By midday, however, the 1/Lincolnshire, with good co-operation from two sections of field artillery and the help of a light trench mortar, had secured Hurtebise Wood; whilst on the right the tanks had driven the Germans out of their position east of the Château des Angles. Soon after, the enemy could be seen withdrawing guns and infantry from the area west of Walincourt. At 2.30 p.m. the 62nd Brigade resumed its advance and reached a line of trenches east of Walincourt and Briseux Woods, the 2/Lincolnshire on the right going a little farther. An arranged attack against Walincourt village and Guillemin Farm at 6 p.m., under a barrage, failed, although the 37th Division on the left co-operated; so no further change took place in the situation of the 21st Division; but it was in touch with the divisions on either side.

[1] 17th Division artillery and one brigade from the 21st, under Br.-General H. W. Newcome, and the XVII and XXXIV Brigades R.G.A.

[2] *11/105th Regiment, 30th Division.*

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The 38th Division's attack had duly been continued at 11.50 a.m. by the 114th Brigade, under a barrage which was dropped on the opening line for twenty minutes previously. The 13/Welch moved south and the 15th north of Malincourt, the 14th starting later to occupy the village. The opposition came chiefly from artillery and long-range machine-gun fire, so that by 1.30 p.m. the objective on or near the Serain–Walincourt road was attained; the left flank was bent back, as the 21st had not succeeded in taking the Bois du Moulin, Walincourt or Guillemin Farm. In view of the enemy's resistance and of the fact that the 33rd Division was to pass through next morning, the orders for exploitation were cancelled.

The troops of the V Corps had therefore overrun the Beaurevoir Line on the whole of the corps front, had taken the villages of Villers Outreaux and Malincourt, and Angle, Walincourt and Hurtebise Woods, made an advance averaging five thousand yards and captured 873 prisoners.

The attack of the IV Corps (Lieut.-General Sir M. Harper) was to be made at 4.30 a.m. in a general north-easterly direction by the 37th and New Zealand Divisions (Major-Generals H. Bruce Williams and Sir A. Russell), leaving the 5th and 42nd Divisions in reserve. The first objective entailed taking the Beaurevoir Line on the greater part of the corps front and the village of Lesdain in the valley of the Torrent d'Esnes; junction was to be made with the VI Corps on the high ground beyond, south of Seranvillers. The second objective ran west of Briseux Wood and Esnes and across the ridge north of Esnes, which happened to be its highest part. A short exploitation was included.

Besides the field artillery and four brigades of heavy artillery, a 9·2-inch howitzer battery and a 6-inch gun battery were available.[1]

The 111th Brigade (Br.-General S. G. Francis) made the attack of the 37th Division under a barrage fired by four field brigades,[2] with three tanks of the 12th Tank Battalion assisting. In view of the Bel Aise salient in the Beaurevoir

[1] R.G.A. brigades were affiliated to divisions as follows: LVI to the 37th Division; XC to the New Zealand; LVII and XCII (four batteries of 60-pdrs) were allotted to counter-battery work.

[2] Two of the 5th Division and one each of the 37th and 63rd Divisions under Br.-General F. Potts.

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Line, the advance of the brigade was to take place astride the divisional boundary with the New Zealand Division. The 10/Royal Fusiliers, which led the attack, with the 13/K.R.R.C. in the line guarding its right flank, was first to move eastward to capture the salient; this done, the centre and right were to swing to the right athwart the Beaurevoir Line, part of the barrage conforming, and move down the line. The 13/K.R.R.C. as the barrage passed about 5.10 a.m. was to cross No Man's Land, complete the task of the Fusiliers, if necessary, and then relieve them.

The two strong belts of wire in front of the Beaurevoir Line had been insufficiently cut and were defended by machine guns in concrete emplacements; but in the dark and with the help of the tanks, one of which was knocked out early, the Fusiliers forced their way through. After this, serious resistance ceased and they occupied the support line. Some opposition, however, was encountered by the 13/K.R.R.C. from Germans who had re-appeared in the front trench; but the riflemen advanced through gaps in the wire and reached the first objective, extended the line of the 10/Royal Fusiliers and formed a right defensive flank. The 112th Brigade (Br.-General W. N. Herbert), after a night march of four or five miles, then came up. Although it also suffered casualties from machine-gun posts which had been overlooked in the dark, it passed through the 111th with the 13/Royal Fusiliers and 1/Essex leading; but, being checked, lost the barrage. Later, it resumed the advance by rushes with infantry covering fire, and with the assistance of a tank took a strongpoint north of Hurtebise Farm. With the help of four machine guns and a field battery, the two battalions secured the farm itself, and by 7.30 a.m. were on the second objective. The 1/Hertfordshire then went through the Fusiliers to capture Briseux Wood. The thickness of the brushwood delayed progress, but by 10.20 a.m. the battalion had established a line on the eastern edge of the wood, thus completing the capture of the whole second objective of the 37th Division. An attempt to exploit by the 4/Middlesex (63rd Brigade), sent up for the purpose if the opposition was weak, was met by heavy fire from Guillemin Farm and therefore abandoned.

At 2 p.m. Major-General Bruce Williams, being informed that the New Zealand Division had taken Esnes and that the 21st Division intended to attack Walincourt and Guillemin

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Farm at 6 p.m., ordered the 63rd Brigade (Br.-General R. Oakley), from reserve, less the 4/Middlesex, to attack at the same hour and take the high ground north of the farm. The 8/Lincolnshire and 8/Somerset L.I. got within a quarter of a mile of the objective when, owing to fire from the uncaptured farm, no further progress could be made and the right of the Lincolnshire had to be bent back. At night the 63rd Brigade took over the whole front of the 37th Division.

The New Zealand Division had an entirely successful day. Supported by the barrage of six field artillery brigades,[1] the 2nd and 3rd (Rifle) Brigades (Br.-Generals R. Young and H. E. Hart), with five battalions in front line, cut their way through the wire, without much interference, and after a few minutes' resistance, took the last fragment of the Beaurevoir Line and Lesdains. This village was first passed by on the north, where considerable opposition was encountered, and then on the south, and mopped up, three hundred prisoners being brought out of it. After a pause both brigades went on, fire coming chiefly from Esnes and Seranvillers on the flanks, and they reached the second objective by 8 a.m. The 2nd New Zealand Brigade advanced again at 9.30 a.m. and without great difficulty took Esnes. The four tanks of the 12th Battalion allotted to the division found little to do as the resistance offered in the localities had not been desperate.[2]

A direct counter-attack against Esnes from the east was easily repulsed; but a more serious one came from the north-east from the direction of Wambaix against the left of the 3rd (Rifle) Brigade, led by two tanks.[3] These machines were shelled at close range and disabled in quick succession by the tanks of the 12th Battalion, which arrived in the nick of time, after assisting the 3rd Division at Seranvillers.

Thus the New Zealand Division had taken and held both its objectives, and Esnes into the bargain, and the IV Corps as a whole had advanced about five thousand yards and had taken 1,401 prisoners.

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[1] I and III New Zealand F.A., the two of the 42nd Division, and one each of the 37th and 63rd Divisions, under Br.-General G. N. Johnston, C.R.A., New Zealand Division.

[2] The opponents of the New Zealand Division belonged to the *Jäger Division*.

[3] Captured British tanks adapted by the enemy.

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The operations of the VI Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A Haldane), although successful in the end, were not carried out without a hitch nor without considerable loss. In order to allow the 63rd Division of the XVII Corps on its left to attack Niergnies from the south-west without interference from the Cambrai defences, this division was to form up in the VI Corps area and advance through its front, after which the boundary of the two corps would be shifted nearly three thousand yards to the south. Thus the frontage of the VI Corps for the battle was reduced to little over two thousand yards, opening out again to three thousand five hundred yards at the final objective. Its attack was carried out by the 3rd and 2nd Divisions (Major-Generals C. J. Deverell and C. E. Pereira), leaving the Guards and 62nd Divisions in reserve. The two divisions had as first objective a trench running past the western edges of Seranvillers and Niergnies (exclusive); as second, Seranvillers, la Targette, Forenville and Maison Neuve; and as third, for the right division only, Wambaix village and Halte, with the line bent back to Forenville. Six brigades of heavy artillery and eleven tanks of the 12th Battalion were available.[1]

The 9th and 99th Brigades (Br.-Generals H. C. Potter and A. E. McNamara) led the attack of their divisions, the former under a barrage of five and the latter of four brigades R.F.A.;[2] and in addition to the counter-battery work and shelling of selected targets, incendiary shells were fired on Seranvillers for thirty minutes after zero hour.

The 1/Northumberland Fusiliers and 4/Royal Fusiliers of the 9th Brigade took the first objective easily, and then the 2/Suffolk (76th Brigade) and 13/King's (9th) passed through and secured all the second objective except the north-eastern portion of Seranvillers and la Targette, from both of which machine-gun fire continued, causing serious casualties. About 8.30 a.m. an enemy counter-attack with five tanks, followed by infantry and supported by gun and machine-gun fire, developed against the 2nd Division and the 63rd Division (XVII Corps); it also struck the 13/King's (3rd Division) which was already suffering from enfilade

[1] XXXII, XXXIX, LX, LXIII, LXXXIV and LXXXVIII Brigades R.G.A., the fourth and fifth being affiliated to the two attacking divisions.

[2] With the 3rd Division: its own two, two of the 62nd Division and one Army, under Br.-General J. S. Ollivant.

With the 2nd Division: its own two, one of the Guards Divisions and XIV R.H.A., under Br.-General G. H. Sanders.

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fire, and got in rear of the battalion's line. With the troops on its left, the King's fell back to the first objective.[1] Two tanks allotted to the division then arrived, and they put out of action the two German tanks which had penetrated behind the King's. Some difficulty occurred in arranging a conjoint attack of the 9th Brigade (3rd Division) and the 99th Brigade (2nd Division) to recover what had been lost of the second objective, as both brigadiers were absent from their headquarters and up at the front. Believing that the 2nd Division was advancing, Br.-General Potter (9th) sent his three battalions forward at 1 p.m. under a rather weak barrage; no troops being on their left the attack failed under enfilade fire from both flanks. A plan was then come to at 3rd Division headquarters that if an attack of the 2nd Division at 3 p.m., which had been ordered, was successful, the 9th Brigade would complete the capture of the second objective and join up with the 2nd Division; if, however, the attack of the 2nd Division failed, a conjoint advance would be made later.

The 99th Brigade[2] of the 2nd Division had taken the first objective with slight loss, and the advance to the second had gone well at first; but by 10 a.m. the German counter-attack, already mentioned, had driven the brigade back to the first objective. One of the enemy tanks was knocked out by the two tanks of the 12th Battalion attached to the 2nd Division, two others were engaged by the 99th Light Trench Mortar Battery, with the result that one was captured and the other made off. An immediate advance after this was rendered impossible, wherever it was attempted, by machine-gun fire. It was evident to Br.-General McNamara that a combined advance of the 3rd, 2nd and 63rd (XVII Corps) Divisions was required; it was 12.45 p.m., however, before he got back to his headquarters and heard that the 9th Brigade was attacking at 1 p.m., so it was too late for his battalions to conform. An attack made by them at 3 p.m. was shattered by machine-gun fire from the front and the right flank.

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[1] This counter-attack was made by the *48th Reserve Division*, which had arrived on the previous day from the Gavrelle sector east of Arras.

[2] The fighting strengths of its battalions are recorded:

	Officers	Other Ranks
23/Royal Fusiliers	14	378
1/R. Berkshire	19	444
1/K.R.R.C.	16	385

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Instructions were now given by Lieut.-General Haldane for a combined attack, under a barrage, by the 3rd and 2nd Divisions at 6 p.m. After a thirty minutes' barrage, the 1/Gordon Highlanders and 8/King's Own of the 76th Brigade (3rd Division) went forward in the dusk and were completely successful. All the second objective was secured, including la Targette, although Seranvillers gave some trouble before it was finally mopped up by the 2/Suffolk. The 17/Royal Fusiliers (6th Brigade), which carried out the attack of the 2nd Division, was equally successful: Forenville was taken, and a line established on the second objective, with a left defensive flank; for as the XVII Corps had been counter-attacked again, it had not reached Maison Neuve, and its right was slightly in rear of the second objective. During the night the front line was, by order, withdrawn three hundred yards west of the Esnes–Cambrai road, so that the barrage for the advance next day could come down on this road. The average advance made by the VI Corps had been over three thousand yards, and it had taken about five hundred prisoners.

The task of the XVII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. Fergusson) was to advance in a north-easterly direction—through the left of the VI Corps, as we have seen—in order to encircle Cambrai on the south and compel its evacuation. The main attack was to be carried out by the 63rd Division (Major-General C. A. Blacklock), the 57th Division (Major-General R. W. R. Barnes) protecting its left flank. In reserve were the 19th Division (which had come from the Fifth Army on the 4th, to be exchanged for the 57th), the 24th (which had come from the First Army, less artillery, on the 6th, in exchange for the 52nd), and the 61st (arrived this day from the Fifth Army).

The first objective was a trench just west of Niergnies; the second was Niergnies and the Esnes–Cambrai road beyond it, as far as the crossing of the Marcoing–Cambrai railway, west of which the 57th Division would be responsible. Nine brigades of field artillery[1] and four of heavy were

[1] Those of the 40th and 52nd Divisions, one of the Guards Division, the II New Zealand Brigade, and three Army brigades, under Br.-General C. H. de Rougemont.

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available.[1] Six brigades of the former were to fire the barrage, one was to put a smoke screen on the left flank of the 63rd Division, and two were to fire on the enemy's machine-gun emplacements in support of the operations of the 57th Division. On the 6th October a harassing bombardment by both field and heavy artillery had been begun, and it was continued intermittently until zero hour, 4.30 a.m. on the 8th.

Eight tanks of the 12th Battalion were allotted to the 63rd Division, but only five appeared, and one of these was ditched early on. The 188th and 189th Brigades (Br.-Generals J. F. S. D. Coleridge and B. J. Curling) were employed in the front line.

One tank assisting the right, the 188th Brigade, using the 2/Royal Irish, and the 189th the Drake Battalion, took the first objective very soon after 6 a.m. with numerous prisoners, and the Hawke Battalion then formed a defensive flank to the railway to connect with the 57th Division. In the continuation of the attack at 6.40 a.m. the 1/Royal Marine and Hood Battalions encountered considerable opposition from the southern edge of Niergnies, its cemetery and la Belle Etoile; but with the help of two tanks, the whole of the second objective was secured soon after 8 a.m. and the 170th Brigade (Br.-General A. L. Ransome) of the 57th Division had pushed forward about seven hundred yards between the Marcoing–Cambrai railway and Cambrai. Bickering continued in this sector until evening.

The German counter-attack about 8.30 a.m. in the 63rd Division sector was made with four tanks. These, like those used against the VI Corps, were captured British machines, and it was not realized either by the infantry or by the tank officers that they were hostile until they opened fire at fairly close range, knocked out three tanks and seriously damaged the fourth remaining one. The infantry, taken by surprise, fell back; but the commander of the last tank, with an artillery observing officer, turned round, captured some German field guns and finished off one enemy tank. Infantrymen settled another with a captured anti-tank rifle, and the other two made off. Niergnies, which the enemy had reached was, after a short bombardment, retaken by the Hood Battalion. Both brigades then advanced

[1] XXXV, LXII, LXVI and "Cotter's", the first being affiliated to the 63rd Division.

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once more, and by midday had reoccupied the second and final objective. About 4.30 p.m. the Germans counter-attacked the 188th Brigade, again, assisted by one tank, and drove the front line back two or three hundred yards. This incident prevented any attempt to push along the ridge marked by Belle Etoile–Awoingt, overlooking Cambrai, on the side of which Niergnies lies. At night both brigades were relieved by the 24th Division. The operations of the XVII Corps had achieved the desired result of outflanking Cambrai on the south, and it had taken over twelve hundred prisoners (63rd Division, 1,189), with much less than that number of casualties (63rd Division, 703), thus rounding off a very successful day for the Third Army, the Beaurevoir Line having been broken through and a good advance made. Preparations were taken in hand to continue the advance early next day.

The First Army

The Canadian and XXII Corps of the First Army co-operated during the day with the Third Army by artillery fire and simulated attacks. The Canadian Corps made ready to advance north of Cambrai, but, by General Horne's orders, it was not to move until the Third Army had reached Niergnies–Awoingt. This was not attained, although nearly approached by evening, and as the Third Army was going to attack in the early morning, Lieut.-General Currie decided to begin the operations already arranged for at 1.30 a.m. (9th) and the account of them will be given in the chapter on the 9th October.

NOTE

The Germans on 8th October

The German regimental histories present a doleful account of the 8th October : the infantry absolutely " played out " with the battalions down to an average of 150 of all ranks. The Bavarian official account writes : " The troops were completely used up

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" and burnt to cinders. [The same expression had been used of " the German *Second Army* at the Marne, 1914 by the O.H.L. " emissary, Lieut.-Colonel Hentsch]. Cohesion had only been " maintained in some formations by severe measures ". Towards evening on the 8th[1] the order was given for the retirement to the Hermann Line, "the construction of which behind the two northern " Groups of Armies [Crown Prince Rupprecht's and Boehn's] had " been begun [in mid-September], and similar work was actively " proceeding in rear of the German Crown Prince's Groups ". As usual after a German defeat, a scapegoat had to be found. " On the 8th October Boehn's Group of Armies was broken " up, the *Second Army* passing to Crown Prince Rupprecht's " Group and the *Eighteenth* to the German Crown Prince ".[2] General von Boehn was sent on leave and later reduced to Army commander. Major-General von Lossberg, his Chief of the Staff, whose recipe for defence in depth had become the doctrine of the German Army, but could not be put into effect without forces larger than Germany had at her disposal, and who had said that the Hindenburg Position could not be held when the enemy was close on the heels of the defenders, was also relieved ; after the dismissal of Ludendorff he was, on the 1st November, appointed Chief of the Staff to the Duke Albrecht of Württemberg, who held the front from Metz (inclusive) to the Swiss frontier, with headquarters at Strasbourg.

[1] Ludendorff says of the night of the 8th/9th ; B.O.A. (p. 556) that the retreat was carried out " during the course of the 9th and 10th ". Lossberg (p. 358), however, says that the order was given by O.H.L. on the 9th, but does not state the hour. F.O.A. (vii (ii), p. 99, runs, " in the course of the night of the 8th to 9th October the enemy began an immense movement " of withdrawal ".

As will be seen, Cambrai was evacuated on the night of the 8th/9th, and by 5 a.m. on the 9th on most of the front of the French First Army and British Fourth, Third and First Armies, little was left of the Germans except weak rear guards.

[2] Schwarte, p. 578. The official " Schlachte und Gefechte " gives the date of dissolution as 31st October ; but this is certainly incorrect in fact.

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CHAPTER XV

The Pursuit to the Selle[1]

The Fourth, Third and First Armies

9th October

(Sketches 16, 17, 18 ,19)

During the night of the 8th/9th October,[2] the German *Eighteenth, Second* and *Seventeenth Armies* between the Oise (6 miles south of St. Quentin) and the Sensée canal, that is on the fronts of the left wing of the French First Army, of the Fourth and Third Armies and of the right wing of the First Army, abandoned Cambrai and began a retirement to the Hermann Position, which passed through Avesnes, Valenciennes and Tournai.[3] They left rear guards in a line of localities some three miles from the Allied front, marked by Seboncourt[4]–Bohain–Busigny–Gattigny Wood[5]–Montigny–Ligny–Fontaine–Boistrancourt–Cauroir–Cagnoncles–Iwuy. Thus the first part of the British advance in the dark met with little opposition, and by the time it was light the leading troops were in contact with the defended localities held to delay them, each turned into a little centre of resistance against which field artillery was not much use; so a long pause ensued. It was not until about 11 a.m. that the new situation was realized, and by the time new orders reached the troops, their effort for the day, begun very early, was at an end. Considerable progress, however, was made all along the front.

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[1] According to the Official Nomenclature Report, the 9th October is the second day of the Battle of Cambrai 1918; but as the enemy withdrew about 2.30 a.m., it should properly come under the next official title: "The Pursuit to the Selle", which, in fact, has the overlapping date 9th–12th October.

[2] See Frontispiece.

[3] See Note II at end of Chapter.

[4] See Sketch 17.

[5] See Sketch 16.

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THE FOURTH ARMY[1]

In the late afternoon of the 8th October General Rawlinson, in continuation of the instructions given at 12.45 p.m.,[2] had issued orders for the resumption of the attack at 5.20 a.m. next day. Two objectives, averaging 4,500 yards and 7,000 yards ahead, were defined, the tanks were re-allotted and the Cavalry Corps was told to " be prepared to take advantage of any break in the enemy's defence ".

A thick mist covered the ground in the early morning which did not disperse until about 8.30 a.m.

Little opposition was encountered at first and very good progress was made. So favourable did the prospects appear that at 11.45 a.m. General Rawlinson ordered the Cavalry Corps forward and assigned more distant objectives to his other corps, involving a further advance of an average of three miles; but, although the cavalry did push up, the opportunity of hustling the Germans was lost and, except on the left, the second objective remained the limit of the advance. Low clouds interfered with air operations, which were mainly of the low-flying nature. Morning reports told of crowded columns moving towards Le Cateau, and in the afternoon all available aircraft was diverted to attack them with small bombs and machine guns; but otherwise no news of the presence of any large bodies of the enemy was obtained.

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The IX Corps employed the 46th and 6th Divisions, the former detailed the 138th Brigade (Br.-General F. G. M. Rowley) and the latter the 16th and 71st Brigades. They were supported, the first by one, and the other two by three brigades of field artillery each,[3] by the 5th Tank Battalion (12 Mark V) and one company of whippets, which, however, were not engaged. The reliefs necessary to re-arrange the brigades for the advance were much hindered by the darkness of the night and the thick fog, and by the incessant enemy shelling of the front area with gas and high explosives; but though the troops were in position in time, the commanders were not cheered by the information that the French

[1] See Sketch 17.
[2] See p. 196.
[3] Two of the 6th Division, one of the 46th and four Army brigades.

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on the right were not going to attack until 10 a.m.[1] On account of the thick mist, movements before 6.30 a.m. were very slow. At that hour from the crest of Mericourt ridge, no sign of the enemy could be seen by the 46th Division in the large valley ahead, in which runs the St. Quentin–Le Cateau railway, and as patrols had not encountered any Germans, a company of the 5/Lincolnshire pushed unhindered into the western outskirts of Fresnoy le Grand at the head of the valley. A general advance of the 5/Leicestershire, 5th and 4/Lincolnshire was then ordered by the 138th Brigade to reach the railway, and soon the French were seen coming forward on the right. Fire from Etaves Wood in the French area on the south side of the valley and from the railway then checked progress, and the enemy, realizing that Fresnoy had by this time been evacuated by his troops, shelled the village heavily. Thus it was not until 4.30 p.m. that the railway embankment and Fresnoy station were reached by the 138th Brigade, with the French still unable to turn the Germans out of Etaves Wood.

The 16th and 71st Brigades gained their first objective, a line east of Jonnecourt Farm, about one mile ahead, by 6.30 a.m., capturing only three prisoners en route, and they then sent patrols forward to the railway, where the limit of the barrage was reached. A long pause ensued until the afternoon and, except for erratic enemy shelling and machine-gun fire from the higher ground east of the railway, as long as no movement was made, all was fairly quiet in the 6th Division. A patrol of the 9/Norfolk, of the 71st Brigade on the left, then found Bohain clear, and about 2 p.m. the 1/Leicestershire and the 9/Norfolk advanced again, and by 6 p.m. had established a line east of the village ;[2] a company of the Leicestershire worked southwards down the railway, and after some fighting completed the occupation of the embankment on the divisional front.

The 5th Cavalry Brigade had moved up to Montbréhain early, with the 12th Lancers in advance near Jonnecourt Farm. Its patrols sought diligently to find a gap, but by 5 p.m. it was plain that cavalry could not advance and the brigade was withdrawn to Preselles.

[1] The French XV Corps actually advanced at 8.30 a.m. in consequence of the German retirement.

[2] Four thousand five hundred French inhabitants of the district, concentrated in Bohain by the Germans, were found and liberated.

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In the American II Corps (Major-General G. W. Read), the 30th Division (Major-General E. M. Lewis) was again employed, and it was disposed with the 118th and 117th Infantry Regiments of the 59th Brigade (Br.-General L. D. Tyson) again in the front line, and the 120th and 119th of the 60th Brigade (Br.-General S. L. Faison) eight hundred yards in rear. The 59th Brigade was to take the first objective, the 60th then passing through and taking the second. The divisions had the same artillery and tank support as on the previous day, but of the tanks only the 4th Battalion was engaged, and of the nine machines detailed only six reached the field. Two of these strayed into the XIII Corps area, but, finding out their mistake, returned in time to deal with machine guns on the edge of Sablière Wood, whilst the other four worked usefully south-east of Prémont. Delayed by fire from Bohain, which was not occupied by the IX Corps until about 5 p.m., the 118th Infantry did not reach the first objective until 4 p.m.; but the 117th, on the left, was on it by 12.30 p.m. In each case the supporting regiment went through to the second objective, and the enemy, being in full retreat, offered little opposition except at Busigny, so little indeed that the services of the tanks were not required after the railway had been crossed.

The XIII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir T. Morland) sent forward the 25th and 66th Divisions again, with the same artillery support as on the 8th October. The 75th Brigade (Br.-General C. W. Frizell) (25th Division) and the 199th and 198th Brigades (66th Division) were to take the first objective, when the 74th and S. African Brigades would pass through and take the second. The opposition encountered was not very determined; the right battalion of the 75th Brigade reached the first objective at 6.30 a.m., and the left at 7.30 a.m.; the 199th Brigade was even earlier, arriving on it by 6 a.m. The 198th, however, after capturing Elincourt, with about a dozen prisoners, was delayed by a patch of dense fog for over an hour, and then had to take Pinon Wood and Iris Copse, so that it was not until shortly before 11 a.m. that it gained the first objective.

In the second phase of the attack the 74th Brigade (Br.-General H. M. Craigie-Halkett) after a march of eleven miles, passed through the 75th at 8 a.m. Although without an

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artillery barrage, meeting no opposition except long-range machine-gun fire, it occupied the cutting of the St. Quentin–Le Cateau railway as far as the bridge over the Busigny–Bertry road, and thence a line along that road. The brigade was unable to advance much farther, as the railway cutting of the Busigny–Bertry railway, a thousand yards ahead was occupied in some strength. Soon after it was brought to a stop a squadron of the 6th Cavalry Brigade came up, but owing to wire fencing was unable to assist the infantry by a turning movement, so the main body of the 74th Brigade halted in the valley near Maretz. Preparations were now made for an artillery barrage on the railway cutting and an organized attack at 2 p.m. In this Major-General Harman (3rd Cavalry Division) decided to participate.

The 3rd Cavalry Division, with the corps troops, had by 7 a.m. concentrated between Prémont and Serain, with the 1st Cavalry Division in support, and it sent forward the 7th Cavalry Brigade (Br.-General A. Burt) to keep touch with the advancing infantry. Of the nine armoured cars of the 17th Armoured Car Battalion at divisional disposal, three were allotted to the 6th and four to the 7th Cavalry Brigade, and two of the latter co-operated for a time with the Canadian Cavalry Brigade.

Shortly after 8 a.m. Major-General Harman decided to advance with the 6th Cavalry Brigade (Br.-General E. Paterson) south and the Canadian Cavalry Brigade (Br.-General R. W. Paterson) north of the Roman Road (from Estrées to Forest), the 7th Cavalry Brigade being recalled into divisional reserve; half an hour later the attached troops—the 4th Guards Brigade, the Household Cavalry Machine-Gun Battalion and the Corps Cyclist Battalion—were moved forward. The 6th Cavalry Brigade reported the 25th Division to be halted along the Busigny–Bertry road and its own inability to help owing to the wire fences, but the Canadian Cavalry Brigade was able to give valuable assistance to the 66th Division.

The South African Brigade of this division passed through the first objective as soon as the 198th Brigade reached it. Fire came from Gattigny Wood in front, and at this moment (about 11 a.m.) the Canadian Cavalry Brigade came on the scene with two armoured cars. Covered by the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery Brigade and machine-guns, the Fort Garry Horse, mounted, attacked the wood from the

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south, in spite of losing many men by fire, whilst Lord Strathcona's Horse also mounted, worked round by the north. The Germans soon cleared off, leaving 230 prisoners and one 5·9-inch howitzer, two field guns and forty machine guns in the hands of the Canadian cavalry, which then continued eastwards towards Maurois in the second objective.

Proceeding onwards, the South African Brigade was fired on from Bertry, on the left in the Third Army area; and as the right of that Army appeared to be checked, the 4th South African Battalion summarily cleared the village, and then going on occupied the second objective by 2.30 p.m. It being evident that the enemy's resistance was weakening, the South African Brigade had been ordered to push on, and the 1st Battalion, from reserve, now did so, and by 11 p.m. had occupied Reumont and established an outpost line, relieving some of the 6th Cavalry Brigade who were found there.

Soon after the attack of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade against Gattigny Wood, Lieut.-General Kavanagh received General Rawlinson's 11.45 a.m. order to push on to Le Cateau and carry out the rôle assigned to the Cavalry Corps of upsetting the enemy's communications. After consultation with Major-General Harman, he decided to seize the high ground Honnechy–Maurois, with the 6th and Canadian Cavalry Brigades from the south and north and, if opportunity offered, push on to Reumont. Major-General Harman then heard of the attack planned by the 25th Division for 2 p.m. and decided, as already mentioned, to co-operate in it.

Accordingly, the 6th Cavalry Brigade was ordered to attack Honnechy–Maurois from the south, where there was no wire, and the Canadian Cavalry Brigade to co-operate from the north. Covered by C Battery R.H.A. and the machine-gun squadron, the 6th Cavalry Brigade sent forward the 3rd Dragoon Guards from the south-west and the Royals from the west against Honnechy, whilst the attached 6th Inniskilling Dragoons (7th Brigade) guarded the right towards Escaufourt, and the 10th Hussars were kept in reserve; the seven armoured cars were on the flanks.

The attack was made mounted by the two leading regiments in line of troop columns, and directly the cavalry had passed through, the 74th Brigade rose and advanced. Although enemy aircraft appeared and followed the cavalry

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with bombs and machine-gun fire, and the 3rd Dragoon Guards had to pass under a railway bridge over a road, and considerable enfilade fire came from Escaufourt, the attack was entirely successful. Honnechy was occupied by 2.40 p.m., and soon after the Canadian Cavalry Brigade was in possession of Maurois, and the Germans were retiring.[1]

The two cavalry brigades were now ordered to seize Reumont, which lies on a saddle, and the spurs which run from it eastwards to St. Benin and northwards to la Sotière. Stiff opposition was encountered, as St. Souplet, Reumont and Troisvilles were still held by the Germans, though their columns could be seen retreating eastwards.

By 4.30 p.m., however, the Canadians, with the help of field howitzer, horse artillery and machine-gun fire, had taken Reumont and occupied a line from its eastern edge to la Sotière, capturing thirty prisoners and killing many Germans with the sword. They found troops of the 33rd Division (Third Army) already in occupation of the adjacent Troisvilles. Towards 5 p.m. the 7th Cavalry Brigade was brought up, and the 6th withdrew into support south-west of Reumont, with posts and machine-guns covering that village and Honnechy in co-operation with the 25th Division, whilst the 7th Cavalry Brigade moved to the east of Reumont and sent a squadron forward a mile to ground where it overlooked Le Cateau: two armoured cars actually went into the town, which was found to be in German occupation.

Meantime the Canadian Cavalry Brigade had sent the Royal Canadian Dragoons to seize the high ground between Montay (at the northern end of Le Cateau) and Rambourlieux Farm, which it secured; Lord Strathcona's Horse continued the line westwards to la Sotière; and the Fort Garry Horse came up later to Pont des 4 Vaux (west of Le Cateau) to protect the right. It was now getting dark, and at 6.15 p.m. the XIII Corps Cyclist Battalion, and later the

[1] German accounts would have it (see Note II at end of Chapter) that the charge collapsed under terrific losses. The diary of the 3rd Cavalry Division gives the casualties of the 6th Cavalry Brigade for the whole day as under. The figures in the brigade history, possibly for the charge alone and omitting lightly wounded, are put in brackets:

	Officers	Other Ranks
Killed	2(2)	14(13)
Wounded	11(8)	134 (56)

and 255 (250) horses disabled. The leading regiment lost fewest.

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South African Brigade, arrived to relieve the 7th Cavalry Brigade; but the Canadian Cavalry Brigade remained on the front line until next morning.

THE THIRD ARMY[1]

General Byng's orders, issued at 4.37 p.m. on the 8th, provided for a continuation of the operations, each corps being given one or more localities—in the German rear-guard position, as it happened—as objective, and others as the direction of exploitation. The V Corps had Clary and Caullery as objective; the IV Corps, Ligny and the Bertry–Cambrai railway, on the front of its left wing; the VI Corps, Wambaix and the railway beyond the village; and the XVII Corps, Awoingt, as soon as the VI Corps had gained its objective. On learning that the First Army was going to attack very early on the 9th in order to reach Ramillies, General Byng, at 6.45 p.m., ordered the XVII Corps to attack Awoingt at dawn (about 5.15 a.m.) without waiting for the VI Corps to capture Wambaix first; but if the VI Corps did not intend to attack before dawn, then the attacks of the two corps were to be synchronized by arrangement between them; in the result, they agreed on 5.20 a.m. for zero hour.

An interesting feature of the day was the difference between the procedure of the V Corps and that of the other corps. Whilst in all the divisions of the other corps one or two brigades were sent forward as usual under a barrage, in the V Corps, by Lieut.-General Shute's instructions, as the country ahead was untouched by war and had no sign of trench or wire, the 33rd Division (Major-General R. J. Pinney) and the 17th Division (Major-General P. R. Robertson)—which passed through the 38th and 21st Divisions—detailed composite forces as advanced guards, each including a whole brigade of field artillery; no barrage was fired, but the batteries moved forward close behind the infantry to give support when required. By this method, it was claimed that the advance was faster than under a barrage, and on

[1] See Sketch 16.

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this day, at least, the infantry of the V Corps certainly gained considerably more ground than did the divisions in which the barrage was employed.[1]

The 33rd Division sent forward the 19th Brigade (Br.-General C. R. G. Mayne) with the 156th Brigade R.F.A., the 11th Field Company R.E., a machine-gun company and one squadron North Irish Horse. Without much opposition, by 9.30 a.m. it had occupied the first objective, the greater part of Clary (not entirely cleared until 11 a.m.) and the road south of it, where it captured three field guns. Machine-gun fire now came from Gattigny Wood on the right and Montigny on the left; but the gallant action of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, already mentioned in connection with the 66th Division (Fourth Army), had by 11 a.m. disposed of the former opposition; Montigny, however, continued to resist the 17th Division until 1 p.m. Orders emanating from the Third Army were now received by telephone for the 19th Brigade to press on to the Selle, the other brigades following. The high ground east of Clary was occupied; but it was not until a fresh battalion came up to the front about 2 p.m. that the advance was resumed. Bertry, roughly cleared shortly before by the South African Brigade (Fourth Army), was occupied after slight opposition. Troisvilles offered more resistance, but was rushed by the 1/Cameronians, which inflicted considerable loss on the retiring Germans, and a howitzer battery then kept under fire the Inchy–Le Cateau road along which enemy columns were retreating. Three platoons of the Cameronians actually pushed on to Neuvilly and reached the Selle, but then, meeting with machine-gun fire, had to fall back, bringing the information that the line of the river was held in strength. An outpost line was taken up for the night east and north of Troisvilles, guarded on the front and the left by the Canadian Cavalry Brigade. The 33rd Division had made an advance of 7½ miles.

[1] V Corps instruction laid down the rôle of divisional advanced guards as follows:

(*a*) If the enemy retires, touch with the enemy will be maintained by corps cyclist squadrons attached to front line divisions, supported by the artillery and infantry of the advanced guard.

(*b*) If the enemy does not retire, advanced guards should push back the enemy rear guards up to a distance of two or three miles from the main position. In so doing they will encounter opposition, and if the opposition is so strong that the advanced guards are unable to make headway without support from the main bodies, or only by incurring serious casualties, the advance will not be pressed without further orders from corps headquarters.

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The 17th Division detailed the 51st Brigade (Br.-General R. M. Dudgeon) as advanced guard, strengthened by the LXXVIII Brigade R.F.A., four mobile 6-inch Newton mortars, one section 77th Field Company R.E., and a machine-gun company; the artillery and cyclists covering the 21st Division were to join it as it passed through. It was given five objectives, to be reached by bounds. Caullery and the road passing north and south through it, the third objective, was reached without serious opposition, and the advance to the fourth, the Clary–Ligny railway, was continued at 8.20 a.m. There the brigade was held up for nearly four hours by artillery and machine-gun fire from the northern end of Clary on the flank (not cleared by the 33rd Division until 11 a.m.) and from Montigny in front. Attempts were made in vain to turn the flanks; but after additional artillery had been brought up, it was possible about 1 p.m., after the 11 a.m. orders to push on had been received, to resume the advance and occupy Montigny, and eventually, about 6 p.m., Tronquoy. As machine-gun fire was coming from the railway line to the north and connection had not been made with the IV Corps on the left, outposts facing east and north were put out. The total advance of the 17th Division had been 5½ miles.

The IV Corps employed the 37th and New Zealand Divisions, as on the previous day, under barrages, with definite objectives, from which the barrages moved at fixed times. The two divisions moved on either side of the valley of the Torrent d'Esnes, which had lain across the British front at the Battle of Le Cateau in 1914. The 37th Division had three objectives: a line east of Haucourt, a line west of Ligny, and Ligny itself and the high ground north-west of it; the New Zealand Division had two: the Ligny–Wambaix road and the Caudry–Cambrai railway. The greater part of the advance was unopposed. The 37th Division, passing the 112th Brigade through the 63rd at the first objective, and stopping the barrage there, was on the third objective, including Ligny, by noon. The 2nd and 3rd (Rifle) New Zealand Brigades reached their final objective, nearly three thousand yards nearer than that of the 112th Brigade, as early as 9 a.m. A squadron of the 3rd Hussars, at 10 a.m., crossed the railway, mounted, but was driven back by fire from Fontaine with considerable casualties, especially

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in horses. The New Zealand infantry advanced again, and by 11.30 a.m. had reached a line of high ground twelve hundred yards ahead ; but fire from the houses of Fontaine and Beauvois then stopped progress. The 112th Brigade was similarly held up by fire from Caudry, machine guns being mounted in the top storeys of the highest houses, commanding all the approaches. Attempts to dislodge the enemy by field gun, Stokes mortar and machine-gun fire were of no avail, advance over bare glacis slopes by daylight was impossible, and the front line therefore dug in where it was, over a thousand yards beyond the original objective of the day. At midnight a patrol found Fontaine evacuated.

In the VI Corps the Guards Division (Major-Genera. T. G. Matheson) passed through the 3rd and 2nd Divisionl to continue the attack with the 1st and 2nd Guards Brigades (Br.-General C. R. Champion de Crespigny and B. Ns Sergison-Brooke) leading under a barrage. Two sections of field artillery followed in close support of each brigade for the purpose of dealing with tanks if they appeared, as they had done on the previous day. The objective ran east of Wambaix as far as the Halte, the third objective of the 8th October, and then along the railway to the corps boundary. After the capture of this, two brigades of field artillery were to be sent up, and both Guards brigades were to gain ground eastwards by means of patrols. The enemy, as elsewhere, was found to have disappeared ; Wambaix was occupied and, beyond the objective, Cattenières, Estourmel and, later, Igniel were taken. Further advance was opposed, and after various attempts to outflank the enemy machine-gun posts, it was decided to wait for darkness before trying to improve the situation. Accordingly, at 1 a.m. (10th) the 2/Grenadier Guards, moving astride the road from Cattenières, took Boistrancourt, on a long north-south ridge across and commanding the Cambrai–Le Cateau road.

The XVII Corps issued orders on the evening of the 8th for the 24th Division (Major-General A. C. Daly) to attack under a barrage, with a protective smoke screen on its left flank. Awoingt and the railway line east and north of it were its objective, and a flank was to be thrown back to connect with the 57th Division at la Belle Etoile. The 73rd Brigade (Br.-General R. J. Collins), supported by the

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178th Brigade R.F.A., was instructed to be ready to pass through at the objective on orders from the division.

At 4 a.m. came a report from the Canadian Corps that it had taken Ramillies and had one battalion across the canal at Pont d'Aire. Although patrols of the 57th Division had met with opposition during the night this ceased about 5 a.m., and they were able to enter Cambrai town, where they met Canadian patrols. So anxiety for the left flank of the XVII Corps was early removed.

The 72nd Brigade (Br.-General R. W. Morgan), captured all its objectives with little opposition, and then Br.-General Collins, without waiting for orders, took his brigade through, reporting his intention to the division at 9.30 a.m. Led by a squadron of the Carabiniers (corps cavalry), the 9/R. Sussex reached Cauroir ; but it was then checked by machine-gun fire from the ridge east of the village. In this situation, about midday, divisional orders were received for the 73rd Brigade, strengthened by a troop of the Carabiniers, the LVI and 181st Brigades R.F.A., two sections of the 104th Field Company R.E., and two machine-gun companies to form an advanced guard, establish the line Cauroir–Cagnoncles, and then, followed by the division, continue forward by bounds to St. Aubert. As the additional troops would take some time to arrive, orders were issued for the attack to be made against the ridge east of Cauroir at 4.30 p.m. The ridge was duly taken ; but Cagnoncles was found to be too strongly held to be captured without heavy artillery support, and the Cauroir ridge remained the high-water mark of the advance.

At 7 a.m. Major-General Barnes (57th Division), on receipt of reports of the enemy's retirement from Cambrai, ordered his three brigades, which were all in the line, to push patrols, followed by supporting infantry, to the railway which runs through the south-west and southern outskirts of Cambrai. This was achieved without opposition, and at 10 a.m. further orders were given to the 171st Brigade, on the left, to clear the southern suburbs of Cambrai as far as the Le Cateau road, and by 4 p.m. this had been carried out. Half an hour later G.H.Q. orders were received for the 57th Division, already squeezed out of the line by the advance of the 24th Division on Cauroir–Cagnoncles, to be withdrawn to entrain for another area (Fifth Army).

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The First Army[1]

The zero hour fixed by the Canadian Corps was 1.30 a.m. (9th): the 2nd Canadian Division (Major-General Sir H. Burstall), on the left, was to cross the Schelde canal and get in touch with the XVII Corps (Third Army) south-east of Escaudoeuvres. After the 2nd had passed the canal, the 3rd Canadian Division (Major-General F. O. W. Loomis) was also to cross on its own front and establish bridgeheads in Cambrai.

The attack of the 2nd Canadian Division was made by the 5th Canadian Brigade (Br.-General T. L. Tremblay), with Escaudoeuvres and the railway south of it as objective, and by the 6th Canadian Brigade (Br.-General A. Ross), with Ramillies and the ridge west of it as objective. For recognition in the dark all troops taking part wore a white calico band above the elbow on each arm. The 2nd Brigade Canadian Engineers provided footbridges on cork floats to be thrown across the canal at three places between Morenchies and Ramillies. Eight brigades of field artillery fired crashes and standing barrages,[2] and two more field artillery brigades (4th Division) were kept in reserve. The corps heavy artillery bombarded selected points.

The night, though fine, was dark, but direction was well kept. The 26th and 25th Battalions leading the 5th Canadian Brigade, in spite of slight opposition on the left from posts holding the railway south-west of Ramillies and the canal line, crossed the canal by German footbridges and the three thrown under fire by the Canadian engineers. Escaudoeuvres was mopped up and the objective along the railway reached by 6 a.m. From prisoners' statements it appeared that the attack had just anticipated the enemy's withdrawal from the angle between the Schelde and the Sensée canals, which had been ordered to begin between 2.30 a.m. and 3.30 a.m. The 27th Battalion of the 6th Canadian Brigade occupied Ramillies after some opposition, whilst the 31st established a left defensive flank from the north of Ramillies to the south of Blécourt. Patrols having found that the enemy to the north had retired, Blécourt, Bantigny and Cuvillers were occupied.

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[1] See Sketch 18.

[2] Those of the 57th, 2nd Canadian and 3rd Canadian Divisions and two Army brigades, under Br.-General H. A. Panet, C.R.A. 2nd Canadian Division.

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In the 3rd Canadian Division, the 8th Canadian Brigade (Br.-General D. C. Draper) had at 1.30 a.m. sent the left, the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles, forward, and this battalion took the railway embankment on its front with hardly any opposition. It was evident that the enemy had withdrawn; so at 2.30 a.m. Br.-General Draper decided to dispense with the barrage arranged, and ordered his right, the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles, with the 4th, to cross the canal and establish bridgeheads. They were able to do so without opposition, by 7 a.m. were half-way through Cambrai, and by noon were on the railway east of the town.[1]

As soon as the advanced guards were over the canal, the 4th Battalion Canadian Engineers began the construction of bridges: it had a light trestle bridge for infantry and a pontoon bridge at Escaudoeuvres and another pontoon bridge at Morenchies (northern suburb of Cambrai), ready by 7 a.m., and a heavy traffic bridge finished at the former place by 3 p.m. The 6th Battalion built two pontoon bridges near Ramillies. The 7th Battalion had a pontoon bridge on the Douai road, which runs into Cambrai from the north-west, built by 11.15 a.m. and a heavy bridge by 6.15 p.m., the engineers of the XVII Corps constructing another of the same type alongside it, so that two-way traffic could be organized. Parties of engineers had also to be employed on all parts of the front in removing booby traps and searching for charges with delay-action chemical fuzes, including a new pattern which was screwed into shells in ammunition dumps and was distinguishable from an artillery fuze by only an insignificant mark. The work was performed with such flair and skill that no casualties were suffered.

At 10.45 a.m., in consequence of reports of the enemy's general retirement, the First Army[2] issued orders on the telephone for the Canadian Corps to occupy the angle between the Schelde and Sensée canals, and at the same time to advance east of the Schelde so as to cover the left of the Third Army; the XXII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Godley), on the left of the Canadian Corps, holding the long flank

[1] Cambrai was held by the *18th Reserve Division*. Owing to the loss of Niergnies, overlooking the town on the south, it was considered necessary to evacuate it, and the rear guard withdrew at 2.30 a.m. (9th). The division then took up a position from Cagnoncles to Naves.

[2] See Sketch 18.

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facing north along the Sensée canal and river was to relieve the Canadians as far east as Fressies on the night of the 9th/10th so as to free the whole of the Canadian Corps to follow the retreating enemy. Accordingly at 12.25 p.m. Lieut.-General Currie gave orders for an advance of about four miles on the whole corps frontage from the Third Army boundary to the Sensée canal.

> The 3rd Canadian Division was to establish posts on the railway immediately east of Cambrai, until troops of the XVII Corps and 2nd Canadian Division had passed through, when it would withdraw into and west of the town ;
>
> the 2nd Canadian Division was to advance forthwith and make contact with the XVII Corps in the vicinity of Cauroir, and then, in conjunction with it, capture the line Naves–Thun Lévêque (exclusive) ;
>
> the 11th Division was to capture the line Thun Lévêque (inclusive)–Paillencourt.

The line given as the objective was not quite reached, except on the left. The 5th Canadian Brigade, which did not attack until 5 p.m., was held up about a thousand yards short of Naves : the 6th, starting at 3 p.m., passed through Eswars, but was then checked by fire from Thun St. Martin and Thun Lévêque.

The 11th Division was warned about 11 a.m. to be prepared to advance, and the 34th Brigade (Br.-General B. G. Clay), which was in the line, went forward at 2.45 p.m., supported by the 5th Canadian Division artillery. It met with a certain amount of fire from Paillencourt ; the resistance, however, was not very strong, and by 5.30 p.m. it was in possession of the village, the Germans retiring northward across the Sensée canal. The 33rd Brigade (Br.-General F. G. Spring) was in the process of relief by the 168th Brigade as far east as Aubencheul au Bac when the 12.25 p.m. orders arrived, and it made 3.30 p.m. its zero hour. At the cost of a few casualties caused by fire from Fressies, it established a defensive flank from the 34th Brigade in Paillencourt back to the old front. The 32nd Brigade (Br.-General W. P. S. Foord), which was to come up on the right of the 34th, was in reserve ten miles back at Marquion near the Canal du Nord, and did not leave there until 2.30 p.m. Its advanced party did not arrive near its destination,

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Thun Lévêque, until night had fallen, so it was decided to postpone the attack until morning; but two platoons, sent forward at 12.30 a.m. (10th), found the village evacuated and established posts on the far edge.

The 3rd Canadian Division, like the 57th, squeezed out by the junction of the 24th Division (Third Army) and the 2nd Canadian Division, east of Cambrai, was withdrawn into reserve on the morning of the 10th. The opposition to the Canadian Corps, as it had been to the Fourth and Third Armies, was weak and came chiefly from rear guards, so that the corps had accomplished a good deal more than originally asked of it.

For the XXII Corps[1], except for taking over part of the Canadian Corps frontage, the 9th October was a quiet day; but patrols pushed forward to the Sensée canal found the enemy still in position.

In the VIII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Hunter-Weston), the 8th Division (Major-General W. C. G. Heneker), whose centre and left had gained a little ground on the 8th, at dawn again went forward about half a mile in co-operation with the 12th Division (Major-General H. W. Higginson). The enemy had evacuated his front line, and gone back, as subsequently discovered, to the Drocourt–Quéant Line. The 12th Division reached and occupied the Fresnes–Rouvroy Line for its whole length. Noyelles, on the extreme left still held out, but most of the village, after half an hour's bombardment, was captured about 6 p.m. by the 37th Brigade in conjunction with the 173rd Brigade of the 58th Division (Major-General F. W. Ramsay), when Loison was also taken.

Thus the enemy was in retreat on the whole front of the Fourth, Third and First Armies, and also of the French First Army on their right. Northward, the Fifth and Second Armies and the Belgian–French forces had made no progress since the 2nd October, and were preparing for a new offensive. In the Argonne, the American First Army and French Fourth Army were still hammering at the German line, and had made little progress since the 4th October.

[1] See Sketch 19.

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NOTE I

The French on 9th October

(Sketch 14)

Of the French Armies, only the Fourth, in co-operation with the Americans, and the First, in co-operation with the British, went into action on the 9th. The last named made an average advance of just under three miles, but on the left, next to the British, less than two miles, so that at night the French line was about three miles behind the general line of the British at Bohain and northwards.

During the day Maréchal Foch, speaking directly to General Debeney, and General Pétain, addressing him through the G.A.R., both begged and insisted that the First Army should push on. General Fayolle fixed its mission as " to manoeuvre by the left, " always in liaison with the right of the British Fourth Army, " with the general direction of Ribemont and Guise and la Capelle " [15 miles north-east of Guise] ".

NOTE II

The Germans on 9th October

(End-paper B)

The Hermann Position, to which the Germans began to retire on the early morning of the 9th, existed for the most part only on paper.[1] According to regimental histories (e.g., " Res. Regt. No. 8 "), it ran, beginning in the north, along the Terneusen canal (west of Ghent), along the middle course of the Schelde (Oudenarde to Tournai), to Condé, Valenciennes, Solesmes, Le Cateau (on the Selle), Bohain, due south to Mont d'Origny, and then turned eastward, as the Brunhild Position, to Rethel and Dun (on the Meuse 20 miles below Verdun). The sketch map in Lossberg (p. 353) agrees with this, showing the line passing about two thousand yards east of Bohain. Maps captured on the 13th October showed that one sector of Hermann Position I ran east of the Selle from Le Cateau to St. Souplet, with Hermann Position II four miles behind it along the Sambre–Oise canal, and there

[1] It is stated in B.O.A., p. 558 that " on 9th October the *Seventh*, *First* " and *Third Armies* everywhere between the Oise at La Fère and the Argonne " began the retirement to the Hunding–Brunhild Position. By the 13th, " except on the right wing of the *Seventh Army*, which was a few days later, " all formations had completed the movement according to plan ".

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were extensions to the north and south. Air photographs taken on the 14th did not show any Le Cateau–St. Souplet position,[1] except for a few lengths of trenches, protected in places by wire, which extended as far as Vaux Andigny, and some rifle pits in pairs on the high ground west of the Selle.

According to regimental accounts, the German rear guards were considerably mauled on the 9th October. Though the *72nd Regiment* (*8th Division*) held Gattigny Wood, its history says nothing about the Canadian cavalry charge. On the other hand, "Regt. No. 413" (*204th Division*), which held from Escaufourt along a sunken road to Honnechy station, has a detailed account of being charged by wave after wave of cavalry: "there must "have been fifteen or twenty of them, and wave after wave "collapsed under infantry, machine-gun and artillery fire". As will be seen from the previous narrative, the casualties of the 6th Cavalry Brigade, which made the charge, were not very heavy.

NOTE III

BRIDGING IN THE ADVANCE

The British army had available two steel portable bridges for the rapid replacement of damaged road bridges (see "The Work "of the Royal Engineers in the European War, 1914–1919. "Bridging"):

(1) *The Hopkins Lattice Girder Bridge*, made up in multiples of 15-foot spans, which could carry tanks over a 150-foot gap and a 17-ton axle load over a 195-foot span. The bridge, of which no part weighed more than 30 cwt., was erected on rollers on the near bank and then hauled over. The erection of a long bridge took a trained squad about 24 hours.

(2) *The Inglis Bridge* consisted of identical bays of steel tubes formed into skeleton pyramids. It was designed to carry all arms with their first-line horsed transport up to a load of 7 tons over a span of 96 feet, later increased to 108 feet. It was erected of double the span in length, on a pivot, and then swung across. An untrained squad took no more than 13 minutes to erect a 108-foot bridge over a canal.

[1] See Sketch 17.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE BATTLES OF THE HINDENBURG LINE (*concluded*)

THE PURSUIT TO THE SELLE (*concluded*)

THE FOURTH, THIRD AND FIRST ARMIES

10TH OCTOBER

(Frontispiece; End-paper A; Sketches 14, 16, 17, 18)

On the 9th October, Sir Douglas Haig had received a summons to meet Maréchal Foch in conference next day, and heard that the Generalissimo proposed to allot new forward boundaries between the Allied Armies,[1] by which the line of demarcation between the right of the Fourth Army and the French First Army, instead of being the Sambre, as he wished, would pass to the south of Avesnes.

The British advance therefore would be due eastwards, instead of north-eastwards as hitherto. In the evening therefore the Field Marshal addressed a letter to the Generalissimo, in which he pointed out that the Fourth, Third and First Armies[2] were now approaching the Selle on a linè extending from Andigny Forest past St. Souplet and Le Cateau to Montrecourt (9½ miles north of Le Cateau): he understood that the Maréchal wished the new Anglo-French boundary to run to Etreux, eastwards, instead of to Wassigny, north-eastwards, as previously agreed: in his opinion, important results might be obtained in a reasonably short time if his Armies continued to move north-eastwards[3] between the Sambre and Schelde towards the line Maubeuge (on the Sambre)—Valenciennes (on the Schelde), so as to cut the German main lateral line of communications Valenciennes–Avesnes–Hirson–Mezières: arrived on the Maubeuge–Valenciennes line, he would be in a position to combine operations with his Second Army and other forces under the command of the King of the Belgians on his left, whilst his right would be protected by the French First Army: if the British frontage were limited to the sector Sambre–Schelde, offensive operations could be continued, but if it were extended progress would come to a stop for lack of fresh

[1] See Frontispiece.
[2] See Sketches 16 and 17.
[3] See End-paper B.

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troops: since no important results on the Argonne front appeared probable within reasonable time, in any case, therefore, he urged strongly that six American divisions, for whose supply he could easily arrange, should be transferred to the British front at once, as necessary reinforcements if the frontage were extended but preferably to take part in the vigorous prosecution of the offensive which he had suggested: this promised very great results, provided that the Allied operations in Flanders were carried out with determination and rapidity.

The British Commander-in-Chief had to make the best of an unpropitious situation. The German front in the West—neglecting the quiet sectors east of the Meuse and in the Vosges—being a flattened right-angle with sides facing south and west, it was evident that the best place to attack the enemy was in the most easterly sector, for choice west of the great fortress of Metz–Thionville; for east of it would lead into the rugged semi-mountainous area of the Eifel, the Hohe Venne and the Hardt. The Meuse–Argonne sector answered the strategic purpose; but there stood the young, enthusiastic but inexperienced American Army, and it had been placed opposite the tactically strongest and most difficult portion of the whole front, the Argonne Forest itself. It was making very little progress, and the French Fourth Army, on its left, in easier country was hardly doing any better. The British Fourth, Third and First Armies were doing well, but strategicly were merely thrusting the Germans towards home, incidentally clearing the enemy away from the front of the central French Armies, which were quiescent. To anticipate Maréchal Foch's phrase, the British were "outflanking the line of the river Serre", which lay in front of the French Tenth Army. Any advance of the British contingent eastward would shorten this French front—the French Second, Ninth and Sixth Armies had already disappeared, and the Third had handed over what remained of its front to the First on the 14th September[1].

[1] See End-paper A. The Ninth Army, having then only 2 divisions, was withdrawn from the front on 24th July and dissolved on 20th August. The commander of the Sixth Army (General Degoutte) and his staff were on 7th September sent to Flanders as staff to the Group of Armies of Flanders, and on 19th (see Chapter XVIII) the Sixth Army was reconstituted in Flanders. The French Second Army was relieved by the American First Army on 22nd September and appeared no more at the front. The Third Army staff, replacing the Tenth (which went to Lorraine) came back to the front on 27th October.

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Actually the combined frontage of the French Armies between the Americans and the British which on the 8th August had been 130 miles, amounted on the 11th November, to anticipate, to no more than forty-two miles. The British Commander-in-Chief was fully justified, therefore in asking that his troops should benefit by the continuous shortening of the front, either by being given less frontage or by receiving reinforcements. The French First Army had been accompanying the right of the British rather than co-operating, always hanging back,[1] and, although General Debeney had been repeatedly—almost daily—"invited" by Maréchal Foch to press on, he had not done so, but he had not been removed from command. It was fairly clear that, on the right, little could be expected of the French Armies under General Pétain, and that they would contribute less and less; on the left, however, the Second Army, for the moment under King Albert, could be relied on to fight. In the circumstances, both strategicly and tactically, north-eastwards seemed to be the proper direction for the British Armies. Had the American–French–British–Belgian Armies been homogeneous like the German, and their divisions interchangeable, all eating the same rations, practising the same tactics, and using the same armament and ammunition, Maréchal Foch's task would have been easier; he could at any time have shifted the best divisions to the decisive spot. But apart from these technical difficulties, the various contingents desired, even demanded, to be kept together as whole national entities, and the experiment of mixing French and British together in March, April and May 1918, and French and Belgian in the recent September offensive had not been productive of such results as would induce the Maréchal to order the "amalgam" so strongly advocated by General Nivelle and his staff in early 1917.

At the conference which took place at midday on the 10th at Mouchy le Châtel, Maréchal Foch expressed himself as very pleased with the British operations, but, although he allowed Wassigny to remain a boundary mark, he refused to make the Sambre the further boundary or to agree to the transfer of American divisions, but he gave way on smaller points. He finally handed to Sir Douglas Haig a "Directive" which was already prepared.[2] It ran as under:

[1] Sketch 14, reduced by photography from a map in F.O.A. vii (ii), makes this abundantly clear.

[2] The full text is in F.O.A. vii (ii), Annex 207.

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"To-day, the 10th October, three convergent operations are in the course of exploitation :[1]

"1. that of Belgium [Flanders Group] ;

"2. that of Solesmes–Wassigny [British] ;

"3. the Aisne–Meuse [American–French] ;

"The most profitable to exploit, thanks to the success of the British Armies, is that of Solesmes–Wassigny. It is therefore to be pursued in the greatest possible strength, in order to develop it at the same time as progress is made toward Avesnes–Mons :

"(*a*) an operation combined with the Belgian offensive, for the purpose of freeing the Lille area ; this to be carried out by British forces acting northeastwards between the Schelde and the Sambre.

"In order to permit the British forces to extend their attacks northwards, the boundary between the British and French Armies will be prolonged in a direction running south of Wassigny and Avesnes in accordance with the attached map.[2]

"(*b*) An operation in co-operation with the Aisne–Meuse offensive in order to outflank [by the west] the line of the river Serre ;[3] this to be carried out by the French First Army.

"In order to allow the French First Army to carry out this operation, all available French resources (of decisive importance : tanks)[4] are to be handed to it.

"Those which can be recovered after the operation will be used to feed either the Belgian or the Aisne–Meuse offensive".

The boundary as above laid down remained in force until the conclusion of hostilities. It will have been observed that nothing was said in the Directive about an offensive from Lorraine, although, as Maréchal Foch issued instructions for it on the 20th October, he must have had it in mind.[5] The British offensive was described as the most profitable to exploit.

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[1] See End-paper A. and Frontispiece.

[2] Not reproduced, see Frontispiece.

[3] The Serre flows east to west into the Oise at La Fère, 12 miles south of St. Quentin.

[4] In the copy of the Directive for General Pétain, the words "of decisive importance : tanks" were added in MS. by Maréchal Foch. They are not in Sir Douglas Haig's copy.

[5] See Chapter XXXV Note III.

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The precise rôle of the French First Army was explained by General Pétain in conveying the substance of the Directive to the G.A.R. He wrote that its principal mission was to outflank the line of the Serre by sending the French First Army towards Guise and then towards the Avesnes–la Capelle (10 miles due south of Avesnes) road in close liaison with the British Fourth Army.

The Fourth Army[1]

During the 10th, 11th and 12th October the Fourth and Third Armies and the right wing of the First Army closed up to the new German north-south position on the east bank of the Selle, which was dignified with the name of the "Hermann Position", but on which little work had been done. The Fourth Army and right wing of the Third Army reached it first, the rest of the attacking forces, which had farther to go, gradually wheeling up abreast of them.

On the 10th October the Fourth Army, advancing from a mile to two and a half miles, came upon the new German position, uncertain, of course, whether the enemy was holding it merely by rearguards or was meaning to stand. Germans had on the previous evening been seen entrenching on the eastern bank of the Selle, but that was not conclusive evidence of either contingency. The advance was resumed by all the three corps at 5.30 a.m., but the 3rd Cavalry Division, which moved half an hour earlier, was either already ahead of the infantry outposts, or soon passed through them, and its movements will be related first.

The morning was rainy and misty and no aeroplane observation was possible before midday. At 6 a.m. the 7th Cavalry Brigade passed through the Canadian Cavalry Brigade holding the line Pont des 4 Vaux–Rambourlieux Farm on the northern Army boundary and relieved it. Patrols sent forward to Le Cateau, Montay and Neuvilly, all on the Selle, were greeted by shell and machine-gun fire,

[1] See Sketch 17.

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and as soon as the main body of the brigade crossed the crest overlooking the Selle it suffered numerous casualties. Three armoured cars and a brigade of artillery of the 33rd Division (Third Army) were sent forward to help, but without avail, and at 9.30 a.m. the brigade was withdrawn from observation into a valley east of Troisvilles. Patrols were now detailed to push northward of Neuvilly to discover whether a passage was possible below that village; but Briastre, the next crossing place two miles farther down stream, and Viesly, a village a mile west of it on the left bank, were both found to be strongly held. At 1.10 p.m. Lieut.-General Kavanagh telegraphed to Fourth Army reporting the situation, and proposing to withdraw the Cavalry Corps to an area west of Maurois–Bertry, and at 1.50 p.m. this was sanctioned by General Rawlinson. At 4 p.m. the Fourth Army added that, if the tactical situation permitted, one cavalry division should be moved north to the valley of the Rau de l'Ercluin between Maurois and Troisvilles, and the other south to the woods around Becquigny.

The 5th Cavalry Brigade with the Fourth Army sent the 12th Lancers forward at 6 a.m. to Jonnecourt Farm. At 8 a.m. the regiment moved to Bohain and pushed patrols forward as far north as Vallée Hasard and the south-west edge of Vaux Andigny; but they were unable to make any progress, and at dusk the advanced troops were withdrawn to Bohain. The total losses of the Cavalry Corps during the 8th, 9th and 10th October had been 7 officers and 77 other ranks killed, and 41 officers and 479 other ranks wounded or missing. It had captured over five hundred prisoners, 10 guns and 60 machine guns; but the cavalry had done nothing that the infantry, with artillery support and cyclists, could not have done for itself at less cost; and the supply of the large force of horses with water and forage had gravely interfered with the sending up of ammunition and the rations for the other arms, and with the allotment of the limited water facilities.[1]

[1] The watering of the cavalry had presented great difficulties, but these had been overcome by the Chief Engineer, Br.-General W. H. Evans, by the use of "canvas belt elevators" carried on wagons, which drew water from deep wells. The elevator consisted of an endless canvas belt which, on being revolved sufficiently fast, brought up water clinging to its surface. A heavier device of the same nature was the "chaîne helice".

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In the IX Corps, only the 138th Brigade (46th Division) and the 71st Brigade (6th Division) went forward at 5.30 a.m. preceded by patrols, without a barrage, but with artillery fire directed on copses, houses, sunken roads and other places likely to harbour the enemy. Little resistance was encountered until about midday, when the leading battalions of the 138th Brigade reached the Retheuil Farm–Bohain road, and its patrols soon obtained contact with the enemy machine-gun posts on the edge of Riquerval Wood. The 71st Brigade was on the line Fontaine du Colombier–Guyot Farm by 7 a.m., and it turned back a right defensive flank along the Fontaine du Colombier road to keep touch with the 138th Brigade, and when the latter brigade halted, the 71st conformed, obtaining touch on the left with the American II Corps near Vallée Hasard. At 4 p.m. the IX Corps cyclists, attached to the 138th Brigade, reconnoitred along the road through the wood towards Regnicourt and found Germans holding the village. Preparations were made to advance through the wood at 2 a.m.(11th). This operation was eventually postponed until 5.15 a.m. Connection with the French on the right was established near Retheuil Farm.

The American II Corps sent the 60th Brigade forward at 5.30 a.m. under a barrage. The 120th Infantry on the right advanced rapidly until it reached the western outskirts of Vaux Andigny, when it came under heavy fire from the houses and from the right. It cleared the village, but could not remain in it owing to shell fire, and so fell back and dug in on a line passing through the western outskirts. The 119th Infantry met no opposition for two thousand yards until it had passed through Escaufourt, being checked about 10 a.m. in its eastern outskirts by gun fire from the high ground east of the Selle. The right gradually fought its way forward and shortly before 1 p.m. entered St. Souplet and cleared the western portion ; owing to the violence of the enemy's fire no attempt, however, was made to cross the river. The left galled by enfilade fire from St. Benin, was checked until the 25th Division (XIII Corps) attacked the village from the south, in the American area, and about 3.30 p.m. took it. The left of the 119th Infantry was then able to make progress, and about 5 p.m. occupied the heights

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south of St. Benin. Connection between the 120th and the 119th Regiments was made by patrols; but the gap which had arisen was not really closed, and better connection was made with the IX Corps by means of a series of posts and patrols furnished by the 118th Infantry sent forward for the purpose.

The XIII Corps had at 5.30 a.m. sent forward the 74th and 75th Brigades of the 25th Division and the 199th Brigade of the 66th Division, each followed by a field artillery brigade, the right protected by the 100th Machine-Gun Battalion, whilst on the left the 198th Brigade started three-quarters of an hour later. The objective was the ridge east of Le Cateau, and at first progress here also was rapid and easy; but at 8.30 a.m. the 74th Brigade was stopped in front of St. Benin, and the 75th halted level with it. The 199th Brigade, much harassed by fire from 5·9-inch batteries as well as field guns at short range, did not arrive on the same line until 12.40 p.m., with the left at Point 143 on the Reumont–Le Cateau road half-way between these places; it then worked down the road to the banks of the Selle, mopping up the Germans in the western portion of Le Cateau, who were being shelled by their own artillery. The 198th Brigade, about the same time, reached a spur parallel to the river overlooking Montay. At 10.40 a.m. Major-General Charles had given orders for the 74th Brigade to capture St. Benin (actually in the American II Corps area) and the spur north of it, as a preliminary to an advance of the whole 25th Division across the Selle. The attack took place at 2.30 p.m. under a creeping barrage. After about an hour's hard fighting, the village was taken and a line established in the eastern outskirts, the enemy immediately putting down a very heavy barrage on St. Benin and on the ground to the west and south-west. Further operations were then postponed until the following morning; but, in view of the general situation, Lieut.-General Morland, the corps commander, acting on instructions from the Fourth Army, ordered that no attack should be made until adequate artillery preparation and support could be provided. At night St. Benin was handed over to the American Corps.

It was by now evident that the Germans were holding the line of the Selle in strength; they had heavy artillery in

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position and, from the prisoners taken,[1] it became plain that enemy reinforcements had been brought up, and that further advance without good artillery support and counter-battery work would be costly.

The Selle and its marshes, too, formed a valuable obstacle in the German defence ; opposite the XIII Corps it was normally only 15 to 18 feet wide and 3 to 4 feet deep, but at the time was swollen by rain and, according to inhabitants, had been dammed below St. Souplet at St. Benin and at the southern exit from Le Cateau, and its margin was marshy for a hundred to two hundred yards on either bank. In the XIII Corps sector, at least, a crossing was impracticable without elaborate bridging operations. To the south of St. Souplet the river was narrower, and, though still of some depth, did not present such a serious obstacle.

The Third Army[2]

On the 10th October the V and IV Corps of the Third Army advanced up to the Selle between Le Cateau and Solesmes, experiencing, like the Fourth Army, little resistance at first, but finding the enemy strongly established on the eastern bank of the stream. On the left, the VI and XVII Corps advanced about five miles, but having farther to go than the right wing corps, ended the day two to three miles from the Selle, although General Byng's orders were to push advanced guards over the stream and secure the crossings at Solesmes and Haussy.

The V Corps left the 33rd and 17th Divisions in the front line ; in the former division the 98th Brigade (Br.-General J. D. Heriot-Maitland) relieved the 19th Brigade, passing through it and taking over its attached artillery, engineers, cyclists and machine-gun company, at 5.20 a.m. ; in the 17th Division, the 50th Brigade (Br.-General J. F. R. Hope),

[1] Of the *5th Reserve Division* (brought from rest near Laon) in Riquerval Wood and others, of the *17th Reserve Division* (just arrived from Lorraine) in Le Cateau.

[2] See Sketch 16.

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similarly passed through the 51st. The leading battalions met with no resistance at first, but were stopped by heavy fire of all kinds when six hundred to a thousand yards from the Selle, and, being on a forward slope, suffered many casualties. Some relief was obtained by the 156th Brigade R.F.A. pushing forward east of Troisvilles and opening fire on four German batteries on the forward slopes on the eastern bank of the Selle.

Lieut.-General Shute, about midday, ordered a combined attack of the 33rd and 17th Divisions at 5 p.m. under a barrage fired by the artillery of all his four divisions and four batteries of heavy artillery, the objective being the ridge about a mile beyond the Selle. Progress through the gardens and houses under spasmodic fire was difficult and slow; but the 2/Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders, supported by the 4/King's, both of the 98th Brigade, managed during the night to establish two posts beyond the river between Montay and Neuvilly, crossing by wading, swimming and using fallen trees. Companies of the 10/West Yorkshire and 7/East Yorkshire of the 50th Brigade also got across the Selle north of Neuvilly and took the railway embankment, the enemy's main line of resistance; but the position was untenable, without support on either side, and at 9 p.m. the companies were withdrawn to the western bank. Thus at night the main line of the V Corps was on the western bank along the Montay–Viesly road at the foot of the slopes of the Selle valley, with two posts east of the stream.

In the IV Corps Lieut.-General Harper asked no more of the 37th and New Zealand Divisions than that they should press the enemy's rear guards and gain ground towards the Selle, rather more than six miles distant. The country was open, with large undulations, but the large villages of Caudry and Fontaine Beauvois, besides smaller agglomerations and farms, were sprawled over it.

The 112th Brigade went forward at 5.20 a.m. under a creeping barrage to capture Audencourt and Caudry, with a standing barrage on the outskirts of the latter place. Very little opposition was offered; some five hundred French civilians were found in Caudry, which had been evacuated during the night, so at 6 a.m. the barrage was stopped. The brigade then pushed on to Bethencourt and a line eastwards of it, where, in the early afternoon, the 63rd Brigade passed

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through with orders to cross the Selle. It advanced about a mile against slight opposition ; on reaching the ridge south-east of Viesly, however, the leading battalion came under a barrage and considerable machine-gun fire ; the advance was nevertheless continued to the ground overlooking the Selle. There Br.-General Oakley decided to wait until dawn before pushing down the slopes to the river. Patrols sent out found the Selle 7 feet deep and 20 feet wide, so the 153rd Field Company R.E. was brought up and about four hundred yards above Briastre it constructed a footbridge of barrels and planks. By this two platoons of the 8/Somerset L.I. and one of the 8/Lincolnshire crossed in the early morning (11th) and established themselves in a position beyond the river.

Patrols of the New Zealand Division which entered Fontaine Beauvois during the night of the 9th/10th found the double village empty, and about 3.30 a.m. the 2nd New Zealand Brigade moved forward to occupy it ; the brigade then waited until the divisions on either side arrived. When the advance was resumed at 8.30 a.m. no opposition was encountered for nearly two miles, when fire came from two farms in front and from Quiévy on the left flank ; the former was mastered and the latter then slackened so that the New Zealanders were able to reach the Bethencourt–Quiévy railway. The two supporting battalions passed through in the early afternoon, and the 1/Otago captured Viesly against some opposition ; but the 2/Canterbury, exposed to fire from Quiévy and au Tertre Farm, beyond it, halted on the Viesly–Quiévy road until the Guards Division came up on the left. In the afternoon the 1/Otago, hearing that the 37th Division, on the right, was going to attack the line of the Selle, advanced with it and reached the western edge of Briastre. According to plan, the 1/New Zealand Brigade should have passed through the 2nd at 6.30 p.m. to secure the final objective and drive the enemy outposts over the Selle. The 2nd New Zealand Brigade had, however, gone farther than expected, and it was not until 10 p.m. that the 1/Wellington (1st Brigade) caught up and went through Briastre with a new objective beyond the river. The Selle was found too deep to scramble through, and eventually the 1/Wellington began crossing by the footbridge made by the engineers of the 37th Division. By that time it was getting light and the battalion suffered

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heavy casualties from fire, but the companies already over the Selle managed to find shelter in the outlying houses of Briastre, and there hold on. Thus both divisions of the IV Corps had established posts beyond the river, with the main line on the ridge on the western side overlooking its valley.

In the VI Corps area the eight miles of country intervening between the front line and the Selle was crossed by the valleys of four streams, with several villages on them. Lieut.-General Haldane ordered the Guards Division to continue the pursuit by bounds, and attached to it the Oxfordshire Hussars, one company of cyclists, three brigades R.F.A. (LXXV 310th and 312th), the LXXXIV Brigade R.G.A. and one company of the 12th Tank Battalion. It would have the support of the LVIII and LXIII Brigades R.G.A. under Br.-General A. Ellershaw (Corps C.H.A.). Major-General Matheson sent forward the 1st and 2nd Guards Brigades at 5 a.m. without a barrage, but with an artillery brigade and two troops Oxfordshire Hussars, one platoon of cyclists and a company of machine-guns attached to each. The advance was to be made in five bounds to a line about six miles ahead running northwards from au Tertre Farm. No resistance was offered until 9 a.m., about half-way to the farm, where east of Bévillers, which village was being so heavily shelled by the enemy that it was avoided, a line of machine-gun posts caused a halt. The opposition did not weaken until towards 4 p.m. when the advance was resumed. Quiévy and St. Hilaire were entered and passed through with hardly a casualty, and a line occupied from au Tertre Farm along the road to St. Hilaire and east of that village. On the left, this was short of the objective, but the flank was in touch with the XVII Corps.

In the XVII Corps, the 73rd Brigade of the 24th Division headed the advance with a brigade of field artillery and the corps mounted troops attached. Orders were given for the remaining four brigades of field artillery and one brigade of heavy, with patrols on the flank to prevent surprise, to advance by bounds in order to deal with rear-guard parties, for which the heavily undulating ground, broken by the valley of the Ereclin, offered excellent facilities. Cagnoncles, a short distance in front, was taken, with a few prisoners,

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after slight opposition, and the advance continued with the Carabiniers and cyclists leading. Rieux was found evacuated, and Avesnes lez Aubert was rushed by the leading squadron and some cyclists. Then about 9 a.m. farther advance was stopped by the enemy in force on the high ground across the valley north of Avesnes. It was most important for him to hold on to this high ground behind the Ereclin, marked by Villers en Cauchies–Iwuy, as a connecting link between the Selle position and the Schelde canal, until the troops in Flanders could retire behind the Schelde.[1] The 13/Middlesex, in support, was passed through the 9/R. Sussex and the 7/Northamptonshire to make the attack and at 4.45 p.m., under a barrage, the 19th Canadian Battalion on the left, co-operating, turned the enemy off the high ground to the north of Avesnes, but at the cost of more than a hundred casualties. The line at night was three-quarters of a mile east of Avesnes, in touch with the divisions on either flank, and three miles from the Selle.

The First Army[2]

The orders of General Horne were for the Canadian Corps to continue operations to cover the left flank of the Third Army and clear the angle between the Schelde and Sensée canals. As the Germans were determined to hold on to the link between the Selle and the Schelde, the tasks proved more difficult than expected.

When Lieut.-General Currie issued orders on the evening of the 9th, Thun Lévêque, not entered by the 11th Division until night, was still completely in the hands of the enemy. The 4th and 6th Canadian Brigades with the same artillery support as on the previous day, were, therefore, to attack at 6 a.m. with a line running east of Naves along the Ereclin stream (then dry) as first objective; the second (nearly the German defence line) starting from a point on the Cambrai–Saulzoir road, the Army boundary, 2,500 yards west of Villers en Cauchies, ran north-westward along the ridge to the eastern outskirts of Iwuy. As a preliminary measure, however, the 6th Canadian Brigade was to capture Thun

[1] See Frontispiece for the general situation.
[2] See Sketch 18.

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Lévêque. Though some fire came from Thun St. Martin, the 31st Battalion, advancing at 5.30 a.m., had little difficulty in accomplishing this, as patrols of the 11th Division were already in the village and the Germans mostly gone.

The 4th Canadian Brigade made the 6 a.m. attack with the 19th and 18th Battalions. The former took Naves easily and was on the first objective by 8.35 a.m.; it then crossed the Ereclin, and against machine-gun fire occupied the Rieux–Iwuy road by 2.30 p.m. in touch with the 24th Division on the right. Seeing the Middlesex advancing against the ridge north of Avesnes, Br.-General Rennie, at 5.15 p.m. directed the 19th Battalion to make its third attack of the day, and against stiff opposition it also, by 7.45 p.m., gained the high ground and joined up with the Middlesex.

The 18th Canadian Battalion reached the Ereclin in the first advance, but was then stopped by machine-gun fire from the left, the 6th Canadian Brigade being behind time. Owing to the late hour on the 9th at which orders were received and the darkness of the night, the 28th and 29th Battalions of this brigade did not reach the forming-up line until 7 a.m. and 8.30 a.m. respectively; the former attacked at once, but it was not until the 29th came up that Thun St. Martin was taken. Fire from the eastern bank of the Ereclin from Iwuy and difficulties of ground then prevented further advance by either battalion, or by the 18th on their right. In the afternoon the 6th Canadian Brigade, hearing that the right of the 4th was going to attack the high ground beyond the Ereclin north of Rieux, ordered two companies of the 28th Battalion to attack Iwuy from the south-east; they crossed the Ereclin, but as the attack of the 4th Canadian Brigade was not made until after dark, they did not proceed much farther. The general advance of the 2nd Canadian Division had, therefore, been from three miles on the right to a little over a mile on the left.

In the 11th Division, as progress on the right did no more than bring the Canadians up into the general line, no advance was attempted. The area between the front line and the Schelde canal was actively patrolled without any enemy being discovered, and Hem Lenglet, on the Sensée canal, was taken in the evening by a well executed attack of the 6/Lincolnshire (33rd Brigade) and a company of the 7/South Staffordshire, posts being established along the canal by 10 p.m.

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Farther to the west, in the XXII Corps[1], patrols of the 56th Division found Fressies, on the south side of the canal, a thousand yards in front of the line, still held by the enemy. With the object of capturing Sailly en Ostrevent, 9 miles farther west, and discovering whether the part of the Drocourt–Quéant Line nearby was still held, the 3rd Canadian Brigade (Br.-General G. S. Tuxford) of the 1st Canadian Division (Major-General A. C. Macdonell) sent the 13th Battalion to attack at 2 a.m. under a barrage. The village was taken with fifty prisoners and a considerable stretch of the Drocourt–Quéant Line occupied without much opposition. Just before daybreak it was decided to withdraw, when a detachment of about fifty men on the left were attacked by very superior numbers and overwhelmed.

In the VIII Corps a further advance of nearly a mile was made by the 8th and 12th Divisions, bringing them close to the Drocourt–Quéant Line; Izel was captured, and, after an unsuccessful enemy counter-attack, Rouvroy was found evacuated. On the front of the 58th Division Noyelles was evacuated by the enemy during the night of the 9th/10th and a line was established east of the village and half a mile of ground gained near Loison.

The general impression gained from the day's operations was that the enemy meant to hold the line of the Selle on the front of the Fourth and Third Armies, but north of this was preparing to withdraw.

After a conference with the Army commanders in the morning of the 11th, the Commander-in-Chief gave orders for an organized offensive of the Fourth, Third and First Armies not earlier than the 14th, the day on which the Second Army and the Flanders Group were to resume the offensive.

The Fourth Army, making the principal effort, was to swing forward its right and establish itself on the general line Wassigny–Le Cateau and, in co-operation

[1] See Sketch 19.

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with the French First Army, push forward strong advanced guards to the Sambre and Oise Canal, six miles ahead ;

the Third Army was to establish itself on the line of the Selle and secure passages over that river ;

the First Army was to protect the left flank of the Third Army ; and

the Cavalry Corps was to be ready to pursue in the general direction of Mons should the enemy carry out a further retirement.

The bringing up of sufficient ammunition and rations was, in consequence of the continuous advance, causing considerable anxiety ; so serious was the problem that, although any delay was undesirable and favoured the enemy, the attack of the line of the Selle had to be postponed until the 17th.[1] The only main (double) railway line of supply for the Fourth Army and the northern corps of the French First Army ran through St. Quentin, and Busigny, and it had been considerably damaged by the enemy, bridges demolished, craters blown in the permanent way, and delay-action charges placed, which were not all discovered and continued to explode at intervals for some weeks. The Third Army was dependent on two single lines : one via Bapaume and Rumilly which had not yet quite reached Cambrai ; the other via Quéant and Bourlon, with a branch towards Aubigny au Bac for the First Army, which was also served on the left by the double line from Arras along the Scarpe valley towards Douai.[2] Distribution from railheads, too, was handicapped by the damage done to the roads and road bridges and by the congestion behind the front.

The general system of forwarding supplies, ammunition and reinforcements was the same as in the earlier years of the War.[3] Supply (ration) trains ran daily without much change ; but a daily conference at G.H.Q. settled the number of trains or trucks to be allotted to each other sort of require-

[1] See Sketch 20.

[2] The details of the plan of railway reconstruction will be found in "Transportation on the Western Front 1914–18", p. 432, *et seq.* The lines ready at various dates shown on Sketch 20 are taken from its Map 13.

[3] Described in "1916" Vol. I.

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ment and, when the demand exceeded possibility, decided which sort was to have precedence. It had been estimated early in 1917 that to maintain simultaneous attacks on the fronts of three Armies, whilst merely holding the rest of the front, two hundred trains per day to all railheads would be required ; but the number run in any one week had never exceeded an average of about 160 per day on the whole British front, a figure reached during the Third Ypres offensive in 1917. During August and September 1918 the number of trains which reached the railheads was around 153, but compared with 1917 a marked increase showed itself in ammunition (with a maximum towards the end of September), reinforcements, tanks and ambulance trains ; but this was more than offset by a decrease in leave trains, supply trains, carriage of trench stores and railway material (including ballast). During October increasing difficulties on the lines near the front brought with them a marked drop in traffic, the average number of trains per day falling to 133 ; a small increase in supply and ambulance trains occurred—for one thing the civilian inhabitants in the freed areas had to be fed—but every other class showed a considerable fall, the ammunition situation being eased a little because the heavier natures of guns had been left behind. To mount a deliberate offensive required the accumulation of ammunition and this was a matter of days, which of course gave the enemy time to elaborate the very embryonic defences of the Hermann Position.

NOTE

The French on 10th October

(Sketch 21)

The American–French offensive was continued in the Argonne on the 10th October without much progress.

Of the centre Armies, the left corps of the French Fifth Army and the two right corps of the Tenth Army, on a front of about eleven miles, " reconnaissances discovering enemy movements of " retirement on the front of their units ", made an advance of

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about two thousand yards in the area north of the Aisne, thus eliminating an enemy salient.[1]

In the French First Army,[2] the right wing stood fast, the left kept contact with the British right. To quote F.O.A., " On " the 10th October during the morning the resistance of the enemy " rear guards was nearly nil ; by midday Neuvillette, Montigny en " Arrouaise, Beautroux and Etaves Wood were already occupied ". At 11 a.m. General Debeney gave more distant objectives.

But at the beginning of the afternoon the enemy began to offer resistance and progress grew slower. The XV Corps took Seboncourt, but could not capture Retheuil le Marlette and Forcé farms [the two latter lie south-east of Retheuil farm] ; the XXXVI Corps was held in the outskirts of Montigny en Arrouaise, and the XXXI Corps on the front of Montigny en Arrouaise–Bernot ; the VIII Corps took the village of Servais and repulsed a strong counter-attack against it.

[1] Carte 6 (details of the Fifth and Tenth Armies), F.O.A. vii (ii), cannot be reconciled with Carte 2 (a general progress map) and the text for 10th October ; but Carte 6 is obviously wrong : for it shows, *inter alia*, as a result of the day a raw left flank running isolated northwards 2,000 yards beyond Braye.

[2] See Sketches 14 and 17.

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CHAPTER XVII

Before the Selle Position

The Fourth, Third and First Armies

11th–16th October

(Frontispiece ; Sketches 14, 16, 17, 18, 19)

During the period 11th–16th October, the Fourth Army[1], the right wing of the Third and the French First Army, only slightly improved their positions, being engaged in making preparations to force the Selle Line. Meanwhile, they kept the enemy's positions and the approaches to them under harassing fire. The left wing of the Third Army and the right wing of the First Army (its outer flank on the Sensée canal) swung forward to come into line with the troops southward of them, and the left wing of the First Army crossed the Drocourt–Quéant Line and made a considerable advance up to the Sensée canal (northern branch) and the Haute Deule canal.

The Fourth Army [2]

On the 11th, in the IX Corps of the Fourth Army, the 137th Brigade (46th Division) and the 71st Brigade (6th Division), starting at 5.30 a.m., after an exhibition in the mist of dummy tanks and figures operated from shell-holes had drawn fire in the wrong direction, advanced several hundred yards against stiff opposition, entered Riquerval Wood and, with the help of one tank, captured Riquerval Farm ; the château was stormed by the headquarters party of the 5/Leicestershire, but could not be held.

The American II Corps also gained ground, capturing Vaux Andigny and la Haie Menneresse. On the front of the XIII Corps no change took place.

On the 12th the 137th Brigade (46th Division) tried but failed to make progress in Riquerval Wood. The 18th Brigade (6th Division) attacked under a barrage with 25 per

[1] See Sketches 16, 17, 18, 19.
[2] See Sketch 17.

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cent. smoke at the unusual hour of 4.30 p.m., with heavy artillery and machine-gun support, in order to capture the spur running north from Regnicourt to Vaux Andigny, which overlooked its trenches. The enemy counter-barrage came down within a minute, the brigade ran into formidable wire and only parts of the objective were reached. To hold these during daylight seemed to be out of the question, so the troops were withdrawn during the night.

Otherwise nothing of importance occurred in the Fourth Army until the 17th; in the interval strong patrols were sent out to secure information, and the artillery of both sides was active. The general deduction drawn was that, although the German divisions were tired and weak, they were very strong in machine guns.

THE THIRD ARMY[1]

To the Third Army General Byng gave orders that no advance was to be made by the main bodies for the present, but that outposts should be pushed over the Selle to cover the construction of bridges. This led to a series of somewhat expensive and largely unprofitable nibblings at the passages of the river. In the V Corps, on the 11th, the 2/Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders of the 33rd Division managed to hold on to its post across the river north of Montay; but the 4/King's had to withdraw from the post south of Neuvilly, as the British shells intended for the village were falling short. In the 17th Division, after dark, the 10/West Yorkshire crossed south of Neuvilly and took three enemy posts, in order to cover the construction of bridges for an attack on the 12th.

In the IV Corps no advance was attempted, as the enemy machine-gun resistance was well organized; in the New Zealand Division, indeed, movement was impossible during daylight.

In the VI Corps, the Guards Division, covering the whole corps front, and sending forward the 3rd Guards Brigade with attached troops as advanced guard, met with considerable opposition and in spite of artillery support was unable to reach the Selle. On the right an advance of two thousand

[1] See Sketch 16.

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yards was made to the spur which overlooks Solesmes station; on the left St. Vaast was taken; but the XVII Corps being unable to take St. Aubert lying to the north, fire from that quarter prevented any further progress.

The XVII Corps had at 5.45 a.m. sent forward only the 17th Brigade of the 24th Division, and without a creeping barrage; it met with obstinate resistance from St. Aubert and from the high ground north-west of the village, was after an advance of 500 yards brought to a standstill, and could do no more than hold on. Its left was involved in a counter-attack made against the 49th Division, which caused a temporary retirement; but the situation was soon restored. The operations of the Third Army on the 11th had not resulted in much gain of ground.

On the 12th October, the Third Army made renewed efforts to gain a position on the eastern bank of the Selle to cover the construction of bridges. On the V Corps front parts of both of its attacking divisions, the 33rd and 17th, starting at 5 a.m., reached their objectives on the high ground beyond the Selle; but the enemy did not permit them to retain their gains. Each division was supported by four brigades of field artillery; in the 33rd Division, however, the ammunition available was insufficient for a regular barrage, and the artillery fired on such targets as presented themselves.

During the night of the 11th/12th, the 11th and 212th Field Companies R.E. of the 33rd Division, under the C.R.E. (Lieut.-Colonel G. F. Evans) had constructed twelve foot-bridges (two to take pack transport) over the Selle, with little interference from the enemy, suffering only two casualties, as his machine-gun fire went high. The 93rd Field Company R.E., working under the C.R.E. of the 17th Division (Lieut.-Colonel F. A. Ferguson), had made four foot-bridges south of Neuvilly. Attempts to make four others north of the village had failed owing to heavy fire; three light bridges had then been carried forward, but the leading platoons found they were able to cross by fording the river, which in that reach turned out to be only three or four feet deep.

In the 33rd Division, the attack was made by the 1/9th Highland L.I. (Glasgow Highlanders) and the 16/K.R.R.C. of the 100th Brigade, which suffered some casualties from

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shell-fire during the march to the assembly position. They crossed the river in darkness as soon as the bridges were ready, and formed up on the eastern bank ready to assault at 5 a.m. Both reached the railway embankment, the Glasgow Highlanders at the second attempt, each battalion taking about forty prisoners; the K.R.R.C. then went on to the ridge beyond.

In the 17th Division, the 9/Duke of Wellington's and the 12/Manchester, of the 52nd Brigade (Br.-General W. Allason), led the attack on either side of Neuvilly, leaving it to be mopped up by the 10/Lancashire Fusiliers. The Manchester reached the railway; the Duke's did so only at one point; but the greater part of Neuvilly was occupied.

About 9 a.m., a counter-attack struck the 100th Brigade (33rd Division),[1] whose right, as the Fourth Army troops were not across the river, was entirely exposed. The K.R.R.C. had to fall back to the railway and, though reinforced by two companies of the 2/Worcestershire, finally retired across the Selle. The Glasgow Highlanders held on to the road west of the railway until 6 p.m., when, after a plan to renew the attack reinforced by a fresh battalion had been abandoned, they were ordered to recross the river.

In the enemy counter-attack at 9 a.m. the Duke of Wellington's (52nd Brigade) had also been driven off their holding on the railway, and part of Neuvilly was lost; but fighting continued into the afternoon without further loss of ground until 3 p.m., when another counter-attack from the north and north-east[2] struck the 12/Manchester which was forced back, but not across the Selle, and the Lancashire Fusiliers then formed a line in Neuvilly along the western bank of the river. At night the Duke of Wellington's, being isolated, were also withdrawn to the western bank. It was a disappointing day for the V Corps: at the cost of over a thousand casualties, after an initial success, it had gained only one small footing east of the Selle; but it had secured command of the crossings of the river, over which it now had ten footbridges intact.

The main operation of the IV Corps on the 12th, had as objective, the ridge about twelve to fourteen hundred yards beyond the Selle, and it was carried out by the 37th Division,

[1] Made by a regiment of the *44th Reserve Division*.
[2] Made by two regiments of the *1st Guard Reserve Division*.

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the New Zealand Division being detailed to protect its left flank by the capture of Belle Vue. The 37th Division already had a holding east of the Selle and a footbridge to it in Briastre, and during the night of the 11th/12th the 153rd Field Company R.E. constructed a pontoon bridge for field artillery and another footbridge south of the village.

The 4/Middlesex, of the 63rd Brigade, already on the eastern bank, made the attack at 5 a.m., covered by a barrage fired by the artillery of its own division and of the 5th Division. It was entirely successful, ten rounds of rapid fire seeming to demoralize the enemy, who abandoned his machine guns and fled ; but, as the New Zealanders had not secured Belle Vue, a left defensive flank had to be formed. The New Zealand attack, made by the 1/Wellington under a barrage of four artillery brigades, had been met by fire from machine guns which even artillery fire concentrated on Belle Vue had failed to silence ; the attacking troops, nevertheless, remained east of the Selle. Br.-General Oakley (63rd Brigade) was preparing an attack on Belle Vue to assist the New Zealanders when the enemy counter-attack at 3 p.m. struck the 17th Division on his right and forced it back. The Middlesex had now both flanks open, and, after inflicting heavy casualties, they fell back first to the railway embankment and finally to the road just west of it. The two divisional commanders, Major-Generals Bruce-Williams and Sir A. H. Russell, then met and arranged a combined attack for 6 p.m. to regain the railway and secure Belle Vue. For this the Middlesex was reinforced by the 8/Somerset L.I. The fresh operation was completely successful and Belle Vue was captured. The casualties of the 37th Division during the day were 236 and of the 1/Wellington, 115. The IV Corps line was now east of the Selle except on the extreme left, and in the centre the enemy's main line of resistance on the railway had been taken.

In the VI Corps, by Lieut.-General Haldane's order, the Guards Division was to resume its advance on the evening of the 12th in order to gain possession of the crossings over the Selle. At 8.15 a.m., however, the 24th Division on the left was seen advancing, and at 9 a.m. an aeroplane report was received stating that the enemy had retired to the Solesmes–Saulzoir railway, which in this sector lies west of the Selle. Orders were accordingly issued for the 3rd Guards Brigade (Br.-General C. P. Heywood), which was

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covering the corps front, to advance, and it did so at 1 p.m., with orders not to push down the forward slopes to the river unless the railway line afforded good cover for consolidation. At the crest of the slope the leading troops were met by an artillery barrage and took cover; but in the evening all three battalions continued on down to the railway and, with little resistance, established themselves there, as the main part of the enemy's force had retired over the Selle.

The XVII Corps had issued orders for the 24th Division on the 12th to reach the Selle between Haussy (inclusive) and Saulzoir (exclusive), and seize the high ground beyond. The 17th Brigade (Br.-General G. Thorpe) which led the advance, detailed the 8/Queen's to start at 8.30 a.m. under a barrage fired by two divisional and two Army brigades, and make good the light railway between St. Aubert and Villers en Cauchies. Zero hour was subsequently postponed to 11 a.m. and then to 12 noon, in order to give time for patrols to discover whether the enemy was still in his positions of the 11th. They found his machine guns gone and, preceded by the XVII Corps Cyclists, the infantry occupied the crest overlooking the Selle with little opposition, although the villages of Haussy, Montrécourt and Saulzoir were evidently strongly held. At 6.30 p.m. Br.-General Thorpe sent the 8/Queen's forward under the same barrage as before, to gain the eastern bank of the Selle whilst the LXII Brigade R.G.A. bombarded the occupied villages from Zero to Zero plus 50 minutes. The enemy cleared out of the part of Montrécourt lying west of the Selle, and two companies of the Queen's reached the river. It proved too deep to ford, but patrols managed to cross by the one remaining girder of a broken bridge. This process, however, was such a slow one that it was decided to hold the western bank. During the night the 105th Field Company R.E., without any covering party and without casualties, made two light pontoon bridges south of Montrécourt.

Although some holdings had been secured on the eastern bank and some bridges built, the eastern rim of the Selle valley had not been reached anywhere, so the situation in the Third Army was not yet ripe for a passage of the river. On the 13th it remained unchanged except that Belle Vue was lost, and on the other hand that the western part of St. Python was cleared. On the 14th, in spite of heavy

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shelling, some small gains were made: the 17th Division established two platoons across the Selle south of Neuvilly; the Guards Division secured two bridgeheads north of St. Python, and the 24th Division occupied the western outskirts of Haussy. On the 15th, the 42nd Division, which had relieved the New Zealanders, formed an outpost line on the eastern bank, but one of the Guards' bridgeheads was lost.

On the 16th the only operation of importance was an attack against Haussy at 5.10 a.m. by the three battalions of the 72nd Brigade (24th Division), assisted by a company of the 1/Coldstream Guards. The 1/North Staffordshire lost heavily from shell fire on its way to the assaulting position; but the 9/East Surrey and 8/R. West Kent went through the village to the eastern side, taking over four hundred prisoners. About 2 p.m. the enemy counter-attacked and broke in from the south behind the front line, and Haussy was lost. A further enemy counter-attack about midnight led to a retirement of the 72nd Brigade to the line occupied in the morning.

The First Army[1]

On the 3rd October, in a warning order, General Horne had expressed his intention of relieving the Canadian Corps, which had experienced much hard fighting since the 27th September, by the XXII Corps, on its left, which had been less heavily engaged. The two corps were to change places in the line. Two reliefs had actually taken place; these were the exchange on the night of the 6th/7th of the 4th (British) Division, attached to the Canadian Corps, for the 1st Canadian Division from the reserve of the XXII Corps, and the replacement of the right of the 2nd Canadian Division by the 49th Division from G.H.Q. Reserve on the night of the 10th/11th. The 51st Division of the XXII Corps relieved the left of 2nd Canadian Division on the following night, and the 2nd Canadian Division was then to relieve the 11th (British) Division, attached to the Canadian Corps, which it did by the morning of the 13th. The 4th Canadian Division passed into Army reserve at noon on the 11th, and the staffs of the Canadian and XXII Corps exchanged sectors at 5 p.m. on that day. The former then had under it

[1] See Sketches 18, 19.

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the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions and the 56th Division, and, until the morning of the 13th, the 11th Division; and the XXII Corps had the 4th, 49th and 51st Divisions, and from the morning of the 13th, the 11th Division.

The First Army orders for the 11th October were that the Canadian Corps was to continue to protect the left flank of the Third Army in its advance, with the road Saulzoir on the Selle–Avesnes le Sec–Lieu St. Amand as its objective. The fighting on the 11th took the form of two distinct operations: first, on the right, the action of the Canadian Corps, which, after a severe struggle, took Iwuy and obliterated the re-entrant there; secondly, on the left, the attack of the VIII Corps against and beyond the Drocourt–Quéant Line.

The attack of the Canadian Corps was made by the 49th (West Riding) and the 2nd Canadian Divisions (Major-Generals N. J. G. Cameron and H. E. Burstall). The 147th and 146th Brigades (Br.-Generals H. H. S. Morant and G. A. P. Rennie) of the former division passed through the right wing of the 2nd Canadian Division, which closed to the left, at 9 a.m. Artillery support for them was provided by five field artillery brigades.[1]

Surprised by the late hour of the attack, the enemy was not ready and the 49th Division went forward rapidly over perfectly open country. Many prisoners, with two field batteries, were taken, and by 10 a.m. the leading troops were approaching Villers en Cauchies–Avesnes le Sec. The 4th and 6th Canadian Brigades (Br.-Generals G. E. McGuaig and A. Ross), which had the support of eight brigades of field artillery, as on the 9th October, encountered more resistance, and the 4th for the first half hour suffered considerable casualties from artillery fire and even more from machine-gun fire from Iwuy, the capture of which village, however, was soon effected by the 6th Canadian Brigade, although the place was not completely mopped up before 1 p.m. By 10 a.m. the 4th Canadian Brigade, like the 147th and 146th Brigades, was approaching its objective, Avesnes le Sec–la Maison Blanche. A few minutes later, the German accounts say at 10.20 a.m., the enemy launched a counter-attack of six or seven tanks, accompanied by infantry and

[1] Two each of the 49th and 4th Divisions, and the 147th Army Brigade R. A., under Br.-General A. B. Forman, C.R.A. 49th Division.

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well supported by artillery and machine-gun fire. It struck the left wing in the attack, on which flank, delayed by the resistance of Iwuy, the 6th Canadian Brigade was not yet up. The whole line retired under fire about two thousand yards to the ridge west of the Villers en Cauchies–Iwuy road. The German tanks very soon, about noon, came under artillery fire from batteries which had galloped up, and they turned and retired, and under machine-gun and rifle fire the enemy infantry also withdrew. The casualties in the British retirement over open ground had been heavy, the 147th and 146th Brigades each losing about nine hundred men, and the 4th Canadian nearly seven hundred.[1] The reorganization of the three brigades, therefore, took some time; but at 3.30 p.m. they made a short advance to the next ridge and got touch of the Third Army on the right and the 6th Canadian Brigade, now beyond Iwuy, on the left.

In co-operation with this last brigade, two battalions of the 32nd Brigade (11th Division) had crossed the Schelde canal at Thun Lévêque and advanced to the east of Iwuy, but were withdrawn in the evening. The third battalion cleared the west bank of the canal northward as far as Estrun, and a battalion of the 34th Brigade, on the left, cleared the south bank of the Sensée canal eastward, also as far as Estrun. Thus the line of the Canadian Corps at 5 p.m., when Lieut.-General Currie handed over his front to the XXII Corps, was an arc from the Army boundary to the Cambrai–Denain railway, covering Iwuy and Estrun. The Schelde canal up to Iwuy then became the boundary between the two corps and north of this the Iwuy–Denain railway.

The second operation of the First Army on the 11th October[2] was a successful attack by the VIII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Hunter-Weston). Sufficient artillery to tackle the

[1] According to regimental histories, the counter-attack was made by the *371st Regiment*, the *III* and parts of the *I* and *II Battalions* of the *370th Regiment* (*10th Ersatz Division*), and the *1st Panzer Detachment* (5 German tanks); on seeing the tanks, the infantry of the *18th Reserve Division* also sprang up and rushed forward.

"Regts. Nos. 84 and 370" both mention three additional tanks. "Regt. No. 84" states that the ground being open, the opposing lines could be clearly seen, even single British officers leading the units. When the tanks turned and retired the infantry did likewise. "Regt. No. 370", p. 323.

[2] Sketch 19.

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very strong Drocourt–Quéant (D.-Q.) Position on its whole length was not available, and in consequence it was decided that the 23rd Brigade (Br.-General G. W. St. G. Grogan) of the 8th Division should, at 5.10 a.m., attack the position on a frontage of a thousand yards, with its right on the Gavrelle–Brebières road, whilst the 25th Brigade (Br.-General Hon. R. Brand) was to be prepared to mop up from the south the portion of the front within its boundaries. The wire was cut beforehand by the corps heavy artillery, and a barrage fired for the 23rd Brigade by four field brigades[1] and machine guns, with a smaller barrage for the 25th Brigade.

The enemy, it was found, had evacuated the whole of the D–Q Position, leaving only rear-guard parties,[2] and all objectives of the 8th Division were taken by 7.30 a.m. with little opposition and without many casualties. By noon the 23rd Brigade's front was established about three miles from the starting line, and towards 4 p.m. it was able to assist the 1st Canadian Division (temporarily attached to the XXII Corps) on the right, by sending two platoons of the 2/Middlesex across the Scarpe canal to take in flank Mont Metier and Mont George, two small rises of ground from which resistance was coming, and the enemy then decamped. The 25th Brigade by evening had gone a couple of miles farther than the 23rd; the 24th, following later, reached an alignment similar to that of the 23rd.

Next on the left the patrols of the 12th Division (Major-General H. W. Higginson), sent forward at dawn, found the D–Q Position evacuated. It was occupied before 8 a.m. by the 35th and 36th Brigades, which then pushed a little beyond it; but the 37th Brigade, on the left, after capturing Fouquières, stopped short of the Position, as the 58th Division had not come on. This division had not been ordered to advance until 9.35 a.m., when the 173rd Brigade (Br.-General C. E. Corkran) was directed, with the support of the divisional artillery, to capture Harnes Fosses, about a mile ahead. The fosses were occupied without opposition, and by 4 p.m. a line established on the railway line lying to the south, where connection was made with the refused

[1] Two of the 8th Division and two Army brigades, under Br.-General J. W. F. Lamont.

[2] According to prisoners' statements, the *22nd Division* had retired by 3 a.m.

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left of the 12th Division. Annay Switch, in front, was still held by the enemy; but about 7 p.m. it was reported by patrols to be evacuated, and during the night both the 173rd and 175th Brigades advanced unopposed through the switch and by dawn on the 12th had occupied Harnes.

When, at 8.25 a.m. on the 11th, the 1st Canadian Division (XXII Corps) received information that the 8th Division had taken all its objectives, Major-General Macdonell at once ordered the two brigades in the line, the 2nd and 3rd (Br.-Generals R. P. Clark and G. S. Tuxford), to push forward over the Sensée and the Trinquis and reach the high ground Estrées–Noyelle–Mont George beyond.

On the 2nd Canadian Brigade front, owing to lakes and marshes, the only possible crossing place was at Lécluse–Tortéquenne, and Br.-General Clark at 9.15 a.m. ordered his centre battalion, the 7th, to make the attempt. A patrol found that the enemy was still holding Tortéquenne and some houses south of it. A footbridge was thrown across the Sensée, and at 12.20 p.m., after a five-minute bombardment, a company of the 7th rushed the crossing and took Tortéquenne. The rest of the battalion then followed and, after some opposition, captured the villages of Hamel and Bellonne, and by evening had cleared Estrées and established a line beyond on high ground.

Br.-General Tuxford had, at 8.30 a.m., ordered his 16th and 15th Battalions to send out strong patrols, capture the D–Q Position and consolidate on the high ground beyond. Sailly en Ostrevent was found evacuated, which was fortunate, as owing to floods on the Trinquis, the greater part of the two battalions had to cross the river at that village. With only slight resistance, chiefly from long-range machine-gun fire, the D–Q Position was occupied. The advance was then continued and Noyelle taken. Opposition came chiefly from Mont Metier and Mont George on the left; but when about 4 p.m. the troops of the 8th Division attacked these hillocks in flank, resistance collapsed, and the left wing of the 2nd Canadian Brigade then pushed on and joined up with the 8th Division west of Corbehem.

The 56th Division (Major-General Sir A. Hull), on the right of the 1st Canadian Division, found that the northern bank of the Sensée canal, which is 70 feet wide and very deep, was still strongly held. Its patrols were unable to cross;

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but two companies of the 1 13th London (Kensington), advancing at 7 a.m. under a barrage fired by three brigades of artillery, captured Fressies, the last German holding on the southern bank of the canal, with 47 prisoners. The left wing of the First Army had enjoyed a most successful day.

On the 12th October the advance of the First Army was continued on both flanks, by the 49th and 51st Divisions of the XXII Corps on the right, near Estrun and by the 1st Canadian Division (returned to Canadian Corps), and the 8th, 12th and 58th Divisions of the VIII Corps on the left. To connect the two attacks, the 2nd Canadian, the 11th and the 56th Divisions of the Canadian Corps, in the centre, were aligned along the Sensée canal, from Paillencourt westward, the northern bank of which was still held by the Germans. The movements of the left wing were hampered by the waterlogged and in places flooded levels of the Douai plain, which has only an imperceptible fall from the west towards the Sensée (north branch) and Haute Deule canals.

Lieut.-General Godley issued orders for the XXII Corps[1], with the 49th and 51st Divisions in the line and the 4th in reserve, to advance at noon with the same objectives as on the 11th October. Patrols of the 49th Division which went out in the early morning discovered that the enemy had disappeared, so zero hour was changed to 10.15 a.m., and the barrage was cancelled. Without serious opposition, the 147th and 146th Brigades reached the Villers en Cauchies railway shortly before 1 p.m. Patrols of the 51st Division did not confirm the retirement by the enemy, and Major-General Carter-Campbell stuck to the original zero. When, however, the 152nd and 154th Brigades (Br.-Generals W. H. E. Segrave and K. G. Buchanan) advanced they found the Germans had either withdrawn or were in the act of withdrawing and both reached the objective line Avesnes le Sec–la Maison Blanche farm–Hordain (exclusive) by 2 p.m. In a further advance ordered at 3 p.m. the 49th Division established a line along the edge of the high ground overlooking the Selle, and its patrols found the line of the river strongly held. The 51st Division was stopped by fire from

[1] See Sketch 18.

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Lieu St. Amand, which lies at the head of a wide, very shallow, valley leading down to the Schelde, and although some guns were brought up, the bombardment of the village was not heavy enough to shake the defenders; so the division consolidated the first objective.

The 5th Canadian Brigade of the 2nd Canadian Division attacked at noon in co-operation with the 51st Division, and found Hordain evacuated, but the country beyond flooded, the water extending eastward almost up to Lieu St. Amand, and confining the advance to a defile, a narrow strip of ground near the railway; the movement, therefore, came to a standstill, like that of the 51st Division.

No change took place in the centre sector[1] along the Sensée canal, except that, after the 1st Canadian Division, on the left, had captured Arleux, the 167th Brigade (Br.-General G. H. B. Freeth) of the 56th Division (now in the Canadian Corps) sent the 1/7th Middlesex across at Palluel, and, after slight opposition, it established an outpost line east of the village along the northern bank of the canal, thus relieving the Canadians of part of their front. At night the 56th Division extended to relieve the 11th Division, which then went into the reserve of the XXII Corps.

The left wing of the First Army made a large advance on the 12th: on the right as far as the northern branch of the Sensée canal and the Scarpe deviation, almost to the gates of Douai and beyond this point to the edge of the flooded area bordering the Haute Deule canal. The 2nd and 3rd Canadian Brigades of the 1st Canadian Division, starting at 6 a.m., found two well-wired trenches on their front only lightly held by the enemy. Eastward of these opposition increased and Arleux offered considerable resistance, but was captured between 11 a.m. and noon by envelopment from the north and north-east. Corbehem and its faubourg were found to be full of mines and booby traps, and orders were given that these places were not to be occupied until the engineers had removed the charges. The ground nearby, falling gently to the canal, gave no cover, and the eastern bank was strongly held; yet after artillery fire had been concentrated on Férin, which seemed full of machine guns, the Canadians rushed down to the canal, where a

[1] See Sketch 19.

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7-foot bank gave protection, and there established themselves without suffering many casualties. The bridges on the whole front having been destroyed, no attempt to cross the canal was made.

The entire VIII Corps continued the advance on the 12th in the hope of reaching the line of the canals. Little opposition was manifest at first ; but gradually it stiffened. The brigades of the 8th Division, each supported by a group of artillery, did not start until 10.30 a.m., delaying in order to give time for the 12th Division to come abreast, and the centre brigade, the 25th, which was ahead, waited until the others drew level. The 23rd, on the right, received no fire until within six hundred yards of the canal, and continued to advance another three hundred yards until stopped by marshy ground. For reasons already given in the case of the 1st Canadian Division, the 23rd Brigade did not occupy Corbehem. The 25th had to call for a bombardment of the prison and other outlying buildings of Douai before it could go forward to the Douai–Hénin Liétard road, which marked the edge of the waterlogged ground ; the 24th came up on its left without encountering opposition.

The three brigades of the 12th Division had 6 a.m. as zero hour. The 35th Brigade made rapid progress until it came within the fire zone of Courcelles. Then, advancing by short rushes, the 9/Essex took the village ; but all attempts to debouch from it failed in face of heavy fire. The 36th Brigade found Hénin Liétard evacuated, but beyond it encountered increasing opposition. It took Noyelle Godault and Basse Noyelle, however, the latter only three-quarters of a mile from the canal. Machine-gun fire from the villages of Cité Bruno and Dourges, almost islands in the midst of inundated ground, and artillery fire from beyond the canal then checked further progress. The 37th Brigade, after taking " Jerusalem ", was similarly stopped by fire from Courrières.

The 173rd and 175th Brigades of the 58th Division had not completed the previous day's operations until 7 a.m. on the 12th, when they had taken Annay Switch and occupied Harnes ; but they resumed operations during the morning. They found Annay evacuated and advanced to within a thousand yards of the canal, except on the right, where Courrières blocked the way.

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The watery state of the ground near the Haute Deule canal on the left and the line of canals on the right prevented the First Army making even a greater advance than it had achieved.

For the 13th October, General Horne directed the XXII Corps to continue its task of covering the left of the Third Army—which did not advance on this day—and push advanced parties over the Selle ; the Canadian Corps in the centre was to take any opportunity of obtaining bridgeheads over the Sensée canal east of Palleul, and the VIII Corps was to continue its advance pushing parties across the Scarpe and Haute Deule canals whenever possible.

The XXII Corps[1] had no success. Patrols sent out during the night were unable to approach the Selle to cover the throwing of bridges, and when at 9.30 a.m., after half an hour's bombardment of the Haussy–Haspres railway, thought to be the main line of resistance, the 147th and 148th Brigades of the 49th Division went forward, they had already been in view and had suffered severely from a barrage and from the fire of machine-guns west of the railway—missed by the British artillery barrage—and made little progress. They were eventually withdrawn to a position only slightly eastward of the starting line with a loss of over seven hundred men.

The 152nd and 154th Brigades of the 51st Division attacked without a barrage, but after bombardments of Lieu St. Amand and other localities. They also at once came under heavy fire on shelterless ground and although the 7/Argyll got to within a hundred yards of Lieu St. Amand and other small advances were made, all troops were withdrawn at night after nearly a thousand infantrymen had become casualties.

The front of the Canadian Corps[2] also remained unchanged. The 5th Canadian Brigade, on the right, east of the Schelde canal, which attacked in co-operation with the XXII Corps could, like that formation, make no progress. During the night of the 12th/13th patrols and two companies of the

[1] See Sketch 18.
[2] See Sketch 19.

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1/2nd London (56th Division) crossed the Sensée canal by means of a floating bridge, completed by 3 a.m., by the 416th Field Company R.E., and at 5.15 a.m., under a barrage, one company surprised and captured Aubigny au Bac with many prisoners. The Germans counter-attacked at 10.30 a.m., when the two companies were pressed back to a position along a stream. They were able to prevent the enemy from debouching from the village, but, being isolated, were withdrawn at dusk, leaving only a small bridgehead party. They had lost 117 men, but captured 207 prisoners and 10 machine guns. On the rest of the Canadian Corps front along the Sensée canal test barrages disclosed that the enemy was still in position and alert.

The extreme right and extreme left of the VIII Corps were already close to the Scarpe deviation and the Haute Deule canal, and on the 13th the rest of its troops moved forward to within jumping-off distance of these waterways. The 9/Royal Fusiliers (36th Brigade, 12th Division), in fighting which continued until 4 p.m., succeeded in establishing posts on the bank of the canal, and the 5/R. Berkshire cleared Cité Bruno and Dourges. The 174th Brigade (58th Division), which had relieved the 37th Brigade (12th Division) during the night, sent the 7/London in the early morning to take Courrières which, although the village had proved too hard a nut to crack on the previous day, it did without much difficulty. An attempted advance of the battalion to the canal was held up by fire from trenches on the west bank ; and patrols of the 173rd Brigade which managed to reach the canal during the night of the 13th/14th found the farther bank strongly held and were unable to remain in their forward position.

Opposite the 23rd Brigade of the 8th Division the enemy, by cutting the banks of the Scarpe deviation increased the inundation, and so forced the left of the brigade to withdraw about six hundred yards.

To test the strength of the enemy's defences west of the canal Major-General Heneker ordered attacks on the night of the 13th/14th against the villages on the 8th Division front. Wagnonville was occupied by the 25th Brigade and Flers by the 24th without difficulty. One company of the 1/Worcestershire of the 24th went on to a wood on the canal south of Auby, capturing two machine guns there. Owing

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to the high water-level, trenches of no more than 12 to 18 inches depth could be dug, and before dawn a counter-attack on both flanks drove the company to retire suffering severe casualties.

Shortly before this the 1/1st Cambridgeshire (35th Brigade) of the 12th Division, which had on the previous day made a reconnaissance towards Auby, attacked the northern end of the village and reached the canal bank, taking 45 prisoners and eight machine guns; but after the German counter-attack on the Worcestershire the battalion retired to the railway west of the village. On the left, the 9/Essex cleared up Courcelles and captured some houses which lay towards the canal north-east of the village.

The 1st Canadian Division, about 1 a.m. on the 14th, by the use of cork floating bridges, sent four companies of the 1st Brigade across the Sensée canal, two south and two north of Férin; they acquired information as to the defences, but had no means of crossing the Sensée river beyond, which was 15 to 20 feet wide and 6 feet deep; so at 3.40 a.m. the companies were withdrawn by brigade order.

The First Army issued orders for the continuation of the offensive on the 14th, but action was limited to patrol operations. Major-General L. J. Lipsett, commanding the 4th Division, was killed by machine-gun fire whilst reconnoitring in front of Vordon Wood near Saulzoir. The 49th Division occupied the part of Saulzoir west of the Selle during the night of the 14th/15th and established two small bridgeheads, and this formed the only change in the situation. The 4th Canadian Division began the relief of the 56th Division (attached to the Canadian Corps), which went into reserve, the 10th Canadian Brigade taking over its right sector from the 169th Brigade; and the 58th Division of the VIII Corps, retaining its place in the line, was transferred to the I Corps (Fifth Army), the Army boundary being shifted accordingly.

On the 14th[1] the Second Army and the Belgian Army launched a very successful attack eastward, and caused an

[1] See Chapter XVIII.

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enemy retirement which led to the Fifth Army joining in the pursuit on the 15th ; but this movement in the north hardly affected the First Army within the period covered by this chapter.

On the 15th and 16th October, much desultory artillery action took place, but no change in the situation occurred. On the 15th the First Army informed its corps that no organized attack by the Third Army was intended unless the situation demanded it, but that their rôle of covering the left of that Army was maintained, and, if opportunity offered, they were to occupy the far side of the canals in front of them. On the night of the 15th/16th a German attack drove troops of the 10th Canadian Brigade (4th Canadian Division), which had completed the relief of the 56th Division, from the bridgehead south of Aubigny au Bac ; but on the 16th the 5/R. Berkshire of the 36th Brigade (12th Division) forced a crossing over the Haute Deule canal at Pont à Sault. The eve of the offensive of the Fourth Army, therefore, found the Third and First Armies halted in front of a canal line with no more than a few tiny footings beyond it.

The weather from the 11th to the 16th was unfavourable for flying, except on the 14th in Flanders, as will be seen ; but during the period between the 27th September, when the new offensive opened and the 16th October, at least 231 enemy aeroplanes and 21 balloons had been brought down, and 77 aeroplanes driven down out of control. In addition 681½ tons of bombs had been dropped, over a million rounds fired at ground objects and 12,604 photographs taken. The cost had been 150 aeroplanes missing.

NOTE I

THE FRENCH AND AMERICAN ARMIES DURING 11TH-16TH OCTOBER

(Sketch 14)

During the six days, 11th–16th October, the French First Army was, like the British Fourth Army, practically stationary, but the

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retirement of the Germans on the 12th[1] allowed the right of its right corps, the VIII, to " advance easily ". Elsewhere on the First Army front only slight improvements in the line were made. On the 11th and 12th a small advance was made by the XV Corps near Bernoville ; on the 12th and 13th the XXXVI Corps pushed out a small salient near Bernot. On the 13th the right division of the four of the VIII Corps crossed the Serre, but at 8.30 p.m. General Debeney informed his corps that the attack he had projected for the 14th was postponed until the 17th so that they could co-operate with the offensive of the British Fourth Army. On the 14th " the enemy persisted in his resistance north of the " Serre, the XXXVI Corps could not capture Bernoville and the " XXXI Corps did not improve its situation on the Oise ".[2] " On the 15th and 16th the XXXVI Corps tried again [and failed] " to capture Bernoville, and the XXXI Corps tried to widen its " approaches to the Oise near Mont d'Origny ; but it was only the " attacks which began on the 17th which led to any change in " the situation north of the Serre ".

The " vast retirement " of the German *Seventh*, *First* and *Third Armies*,[3] begun on the 9th, to the Hunding–Brunhild Position between the Oise and the Argonne, enabled the French Tenth and Fifth Armies to advance in a " manoeuvre d'exploita- " tion " on the 12th and 13th, but on the next day the resistance of the enemy's rear guards stiffened and no further important advance was possible until the 19th.

The French Fourth Army and the American First Army in the Argonne sector[4] made only a slight gain of ground in this period ; the American front was extended a little farther to the east and, as already noted, the American Second Army came into official existence on the 12th. Its front extended from the Moselle, north of Metz, westward to Fresnes en Woevre, on the Meuse, south of Verdun. General Pershing now commanded a Group of Armies, the First Army being under General Hunter Liggett and the Second under General R. L. Bullard. The total of American divisions in France was 42, of which 4 had arrived in September and 3 in October ; 6 were classed as replacement divisions and 4 as depôt divisions. Of the total, 15 (12 on the quiet Vosges front) were with the French, 4 with the British (the 27th and 30th with the Fourth Army, the 37th and 91st with the Second Army).

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[1] See Chapter XV, Note II.

[2] Thus the text of F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 107, but Carte 5 shows that the right of the XXXI Corps advanced about two thousand yards and in places crossed the Oise.

[3] See End-paper B.

[4] See Sketch 21.

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NOTE II

THE GERMANS IN MID-OCTOBER

On the 9th October President Wilson's reply to the request for an armistice, despatched on the 3rd, was received. It was not so accommodating as was expected. He demanded as preliminaries to negotiations the acceptance of his Fourteen Points and the evacuation of occupied territory. The new German Minister of War, Scheuch, pointed out the significance of the reply:

> " the evacuation, apart from the danger of a disorderly " return of the troops to the Homeland, is the signing " and sealing of our inability to defend ourselves; it is " unconditional surrender ".

Ludendorff arrived in Berlin on the same day and a conference took place. He was opposed to a levée en masse to continue the struggle, but demanded large reinforcements for the army, and a powerful appeal to the people in order to prepare the masses for a life and death struggle. It is recorded that he used the words :[1]

> " It would be a gamble if O.H.L. did not press for steps " towards peace. It may be that we can hold out until the " spring; but any day events may take a different turn . . . " Steps towards peace, still more towards an armistice, are " absolutely necessary. It was only by a hair's breadth " that a break-through was avoided yesterday ". The Vice-Chancellor, Payer, summed up the matter by saying " we want by negotiation to avoid capitulation ".

On the following day the Minister of War informed Ludendorff that by once more combing all industries and calling up the 1900 class (17 years old), he could raise 600,000 men. Ludendorff declared that he did not want them. Two days later (12th) he sent a request to have the reinforcements got ready as soon as possible. The Chancellor then suggested that the Government would like to hear the opinion of other officers about the military situation. Ludendorff ridiculed this idea, saying " O.H.L. alone " has a comprehensive view. The conditions in the different " Armies vary. Deductions as regards one Army do not apply " to the whole front. The General-Field-Marshal and I alone " bear the responsibility. His Majesty may express his wishes " and make demands at any minute, but not the Chancellor " (Ludendorff, p. 595).

On the 12th a reply agreeing to the evacuation of occupied territory was sent to President Wilson. His second Note arrived on the 15th and its terms were unequivocal. It demanded as preliminary condition to an armistice the immediate cessation of U-boat warfare, of wanton destruction and of other illegal and inhuman practices by which Germany carried on war.

[1] Urkunden, p. 89.

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O.H.L., on being informed, continued its policy of passing on the responsibility for collapse to the civil Government. It sent the following telegram to the Chancellor :[1]

" Do the internal conditions permit the withdrawal of all " troops from the Eastern Front without thereby allowing the " entry of Bolshevism into the country ? Will the whole German " people, not only the educated classes, continue the struggle to " the last of their own free will and without compulsion ? "

A Council of War was arranged for the 17th to decide what answer should be sent to President Wilson.

On the 12th Hindenburg had warned the Groups of Armies :

" Diplomatic action to end the War has begun. Its " result will be the more favourable the greater the successs in " holding the forces together, in retaining possession of " conquered territory and in inflicting damage on the " enemy . . . . Any movement to the rear only brings " temporary relief. It affects the morale of the troops and " costs us irreplaceable material and supplies. I beg the " Groups of Armies to consider very earnestly the situation " before agreeing to any retirement. We must not under- " estimate the enemy, but we must also not over-estimate " him ".

Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group of Armies endeavoured to hold out in front of the Hermann Position. On the 16th October O.H.L., no doubt in consequence of the success of the Allied advance in Flanders, felt obliged to give an order for a retirement to this position according to plan. (Kuhl, p. 203).

Documents captured in the ensuing battle showed the importance attached to the holding of the Hermann Position. The orders of the 12th October of an artillery group of the *204th Division*, for instance, contained the following :[2]

" The High Command states that the possibility of an " armistice being brought about depends on the battle " coming to a standstill. All officers are to be informed of " this. Other ranks are to be reminded that every artillery- " man, whether gun-number, telephonist, lineman or other- " wise must carry out his duty to the utmost day and night. " The British must not cross the Selle on our front. The " artillery must prevent them ".

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[1] Urkunden, p. 120.

[2] The *204th Division* was in the line between Souplet and St. Benin opposite the 50th Division.

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CHAPTER XVIII

Battle of Courtrai

The Second Army

14th/15th October

(Sketches 22, 23)

The offensive in Flanders[1] was renewed on the 14th October after more than a week's delay owing to the state of the roads and the disorganization of the supply services in the Belgian and French sectors of the front. In vain Maréchal Foch had pointed out that the successful offensives elsewhere, in the Argonne and against the Beaurevoir Line, were drawing in the German reserves, and begged that a move should be made in Flanders at latest by the 10th of the month. In this quiet interval every endeavour was made in the Second Army by bombardments, harassing fire, wire cutting, feint attacks and patrol work to induce the Germans to believe that an attack was imminent, this was done to such good effect that they fired counter-preparation every morning before dawn.

The order of battle of the Group of Armies of Flanders (G.A.F.)[2], under the King of the Belgians (with a French Chief of the Staff, General Degoutte, forced upon him), was now the British Second Army (General Sir H. Plumer), of four small corps, totalling ten divisions; the Belgian Southern Groupement (Lieut.-General Biebuyck) of three Belgian divisions with the French 164th Division in reserve; the French VII Corps (General Massenet) of two divisions (5th and 41st); the French XXXIV Corps (General Mudant) of three divisions (70th and 77th, with the 128th in reserve); and the Belgian Northern Groupement (Lieut.-General Michel) of three Belgian divisions, with the Belgian cavalry division in reserve. Two other Belgian divisions held the Yser defences from Dixmude downwards; the remaining four Belgian divisions were resting behind the Yser, and the French II Cavalry Corps (General Robillot) of three divisions

[1] See Sketch 22.
[2] See Sketch 23.

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was in reserve behind the Passchendaele Ridge. Thus the total was 12 Belgian divisions, 6 French and 10 British (total 28), with 4 cavalry divisions.

The G.A.F. was exactly faced, as its right extended to Armentières, by the German *Fourth Army* (General Sixt von Armin), of 24 divisions, of which 8 (2 tired, 4 refitting) were in reserve, 3 behind the left (south), 4 behind the centre and 1 behind the right. Opposite the three corps of the British Second Army, which were to attack, were in front line 3 German divisions and 2 infantry regiments,[1] with 3 more divisions in reserve, that is 10 British divisions against 6⅔ German (8⅔ on the 15th). Except south of Gheluwe, all the German Flanders Position I (the Terhand Line) had been won; Flanders Position II (through Ledeghem) still remained to be overcome, and in preparation the days of delay had been utilized for wire-cutting.

The Summary of Intelligence issued by G.H.Q. on the 14th October stated:

> "From the mass of evidence received from agents "it appears that the evacuation of material from the "Belgian coast is now well advanced, and the absence "of any serious work on defences shows that the enemy "will not fight to retain this region indefinitely. The "clearance of Lille also would appear to be nearly "complete, and it is probable that the enemy intends "an early retirement to the line of the Schelde, but it is "likely that this will not occur till he has swung back "his line south of Lille, pivoting on the defences of the "city. Such a course would seem less dangerous than a "general simultaneous retirement on the whole front "from the Sensée to the sea".

The orders of the G.A.F. that the Second Army should form the flank guard for the operations in prospect by holding the line of the Lys down to Harlebeke below Courtrai, still held good. The principal part in the offensive was to be played by the two French corps in the centre, which, after seizing the Roulers–Hooglede plateau, were to press on eastwards to Thielt and Ghent. The Belgian Southern Groupement was to accompany them, and after passing

[1] These were the resting regiments of divisions on quiet parts of the front. By the 15th October the number of divisions opposite the Second Army had increased to 5 in front line and 3 in reserve.

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Harlebeke continue the defensive flank along the Lys. The Belgian Northern Groupement was to keep touch with the French and cover their left, and it was hoped that opportunity would be found for the use of cavalry on that flank. Nothing was said about the possible action of the British Fifth Army: it was hoped that the Allied advance north and south of Lille would ensure the evacuation of the city; all that was required of the Second Army was a wheel to the right up to the Lys.

General Plumer's orders[1] for the X, XIX and II Corps to advance eastwards to the Lys, the XV Corps on the right being already aligned on its northern bank down to Comines, had been issued on the 4th; they were only modified by the issue of a note on the 11th October. This informed his corps commanders that the enemy seemed to be contemplating a retirement from Lille,[2] as the advance of the Fourth, Third and First Armies in the direction of Valenciennes[3] threatened the communications of the troops in that sector with the south: that the evacuation of Lille might be hastened by a threat of the Second Army to cross the Lys: if therefore all went well in the next advance, corps commanders should be prepared to push forward advanced guards and establish bridgeheads on the south side of the river: sites just above Wervicq, Lauwe and Marcke were indicated as suitable places.

Zero hour for all contingents was made 5.35 a.m.[4] No preliminary bombardment was to be fired, but the creeping barrage would be dropped in front of the infantry line three minutes before Zero and move forward at Zero. Co-ordination of the barrage at the junction of the Second and the Belgian Armies presented some difficulty, as the Belgian right was not abreast of the British and the pace of the Belgian barrage—a hundred metres in 3 minutes—was different to the British—a hundred yards in 2 minutes.

[1] See Sketch 22.

[2] He began his retirement before the Fifth Army on the night of the 14th/15th. See Note II at end of Chapter.

[3] The Fourth, Third and right wing of the First Armies had begun this stage of the advance on 8th October. See Chapters XIII, XIV and XXI.

[4] F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 129, states that the French corps and the Belgian Northern Groupement started at 5.30 a.m. (quoting an order issued on 13th October).

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Part of the difficulty could be adjusted by the length of halts, but in order not to check the advance of the British it was decided that each Army should proceed at its own pace, that the Belgian field artillery barrage within a hundred yards of the boundary should conform to the pace and halts of the British barrage, but that the infantry on this part of the front should not follow close behind the barrage and should move at the same speed as the remainder of the Belgian infantry ; and that in order to keep liaison, a detachment of infantry and machine guns of the 9th Division should be detailed to advance, conforming on the left to the pace of the Belgian infantry and its halts. It so happened that the best progress was made astride the British-Belgian boundary.

The attack on the 14th October brought fair success to the Second Army and the Belgian Southern Groupement, the two French corps not making quite such good progress. The weather was fine and bright, but cold, with a ground mist which hampered aerial observation until about 11 a.m.

The X Corps (Lieut.-General R. B. Stephens) gave as general objective the rise of ground just beyond the Lys on either side of Bousbecque. The XIX and II Corps (Lieut.-Generals Sir H. Watts and Sir C. W. Jacob) had as objectives a line from Radish Farm to Gulleghem, and the Courtrai–Roulers railway, respectively. Except for the Bousbecque hills the country immediately ahead of the Second Army near the Lys was flat, a gentle rise northwards beginning about the line Gheluwe–Gulleghem, and only the church towers afforded possibility of ground observation.

The amount of field artillery available was not large, each corps, in addition to the batteries of its divisions, had only two Army field brigades. The allotment of heavy artillery remained as before.[1]

The attack was no surprise ; prisoners divulged that warning had been given by the noise made during the assembly of the troops, and at 4.15 a.m. the enemy put down a heavier counter-preparation than usual with artillery and trench mortars, fortunately without much result, as the fall of his barrages on previous mornings had been noted. A certain amount of resistance was offered from pill-boxes and by machine guns, and more from defended farms, of which there were many behind the lines of trench

[1] See Chapter 61.

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and wire ; but in the opening phase the Germans seemed more disposed to surrender than to fight, even standing ready to be led into captivity fully equipped with their personal comforts on them. In order to blind flanking fire Wervicq was intentionally screened by smoke, and the mist, thickened by the smoke of battle, limited visibility at first to five yards. This seemed, on this occasion, to have been a disadvantage to the attackers, who otherwise, though they had no tanks, could have pressed on faster, without confusion and without going astray.

All the divisions employed two brigades in the front line except the 41st and 9th, which had only one apiece ; but in every case two or three intermediate objectives[1] were given at which either support battalions or brigades passed through the front to carry on the advance.

On the X Corps front, the 90th and 21st Brigades (Br.-Generals G. A. Stevens and G. D. Goodman) of the 30th Division (Major-General W. de L. Williams) reached the objective about 7.30 a.m., though a few posts and farms passed by held out a little longer. Patrols entered Wervicq, finding only machine guns and snipers there ; but the railway in front was strongly held and the country was commanded by the hills near Bousbecque ; patrols could not, therefore, make much progress.

The 102nd and 103rd Brigades (Br.-Generals E. Hilliam and R. I. Rawson) of the 34th Division (Major-General C. L. Nicholson) experienced greater difficulties. The former, after reaching the final objective, was counter-attacked about 10.30 a.m. and its left was driven back to the Terhand Line, although later in the day the position was recovered and touch obtained with the 103rd Brigade. This formation took and mopped up Gheluwe ; but several farms, defended by field guns and trench mortars as well as machine guns, held out for long, particularly Rumanian Farm close to the final objective, and guns had to be brought up to deal with them ; so it was not until 6 p.m. that the final objective was taken.

In the 41st Division (Major-General S. T. B. Lawford) on the XIX Corps front, the 122nd Brigade, with all three battalions in line, after delays due to the mist, in some

[1] The final objective was roughly the line shown on Sketch 22 as gained on the 14th.

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anxiety as to what was happening on its right flank, reached the second intermediate objective about 10 a.m., almost to time. The 124th Brigade, each battalion having a section of field guns with it, then passed through and, in spite of strong resistance from farms and buildings, and attempts at counter-attack, gained the final objective, in many places by midday and the whole of it by 3 p.m., so that consolidation could be reported at 4 p.m.

The attack of the 105th and 104th Brigades (Br.-Generals A. J. Turner and J. W. Sandilands) of the 35th Division (Major-General A. H. Marindin) was rendered difficult: first by the objectives lying obliquely to the general line of advance. To remedy this and to guide the infantry, thermit shells were fired every minute to mark the southern divisional boundary. Secondly, the objective was so far ahead—seven to eight thousand yards—that the artillery would have to shift position in order to keep up the barrage; this was partly adjusted by detailing two gun-batteries and some howitzers to go forward, as soon as the advance began from the second intermediate objective; they were later to be followed by the remainder of the field artillery. The 105th Brigade, after encountering resistance similar to that offered the 41st Division, reached the final objective between 11 a.m. and noon, to find a line about Wevelghem–Gulleghem, on some low ridges half a mile or more ahead, held in considerable strength. The 104th Brigade, after good progress and having collected thirty enemy guns, found that the 36th Division to the north was at the moment held up at Moorseele, and about noon its own left was halted by accurate shelling and by fire from farms on the western side of Gulleghem, which were protected by three belts of wire, and seemed to have good observation, probably from its church tower. A burning ammunition dump also imposed an unforeseen obstacle. The 106th Brigade, being in divisional reserve, was not immediately available, and though a message was received that General Plumer wished that Gulleghem should be taken that night, as the right and centre of the division were well forward and the crossings of the Lys behind the Germans were under artillery fire, the operation was finally postponed until next day.

The attack of the II Corps was led by the 107th and 109th Brigades (Br.-Generals H. J. Brock and W. F. Hessey) of the 36th Division (Major-General C. Coffin), it being

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arranged that there should be a halt at 7.47 a.m. to allow the artillery to move forward to cover the last stage of the advance. After 6 a.m. the German artillery was almost silent, and at first the attack of the 107th Brigade went well. Flanders Position II and the railway behind it were carried and Moorseele was taken with the help of Lewis guns of the 109th Brigade. But a little after midday, the 15/R. Irish Rifles, which was leading, was checked about a mile west of Gulleghem. Though it was reinforced by the 1/R. Irish Rifles and some progress was made, at midnight the line was still three hundred yards west of the village, but in touch with troops on both flanks.

The 109th Brigade suffered a good deal from fire, but by 8 a.m. was abreast of Moorseele, whence machine guns swept the zone to be crossed. Lewis guns replied effectively and after the 107th Brigade had taken the village, the advance was continued, ending a few hundred yards N.W. by N. of Gulleghem, in touch with the 107th Brigade.

The 29th Division (Major-General D. E. Cayley) sent forward the 88th and 86th Brigades (Br.-Generals B. C. Freyberg and G. R. H. Cheape) and they made a good start, crossing the Menin–Roulers railway and clearing Ledeghem. About 9 a.m., however, they were held up for a time on the Moorseele–Rolleghemcappelle road, and subsequently serious resistance was encountered, so that the Gulleghem–De Beurt Farm road was not reached until 2 p.m., and the advance got no farther than the road to Steenbeek leading off the former road, a mile short of the final objective.

On the left, the 28th Brigade (Br.-General J. L. Jack) supported by the 26th (Br.-General Hon. A. G. A. Hore-Ruthven)—which found the liaison party to keep touch with the Belgians—led the advance of the 9th Division (Major-General H. H. Tudor), each battalion of the 28th having a section of 18-pdrs. and two 6-inch mortars with it. The first series of barrage lifts was fifty yards per minute. On the whole, the attack went well: the Wulfdambeek was crossed in the mist on eight portable bridges, and soon after noon the leading unit, the Royal Newfoundland Battalion, was on the first objective close to De Beurt Farm. Br.-General J. L. Jack had been given discretion to decide whether to consolidate or go on, the artillery in the latter case being brought forward. He decided to continue,

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but not much progress could be made, as the Germans had a wired position around Bois de Heule and Laage Kepel Wood.

The liaison detachment of the 26th Brigade on the left was found by a company of the 8/Black Watch, and it met with considerable resistance, particularly at the outset, so that the rest of the battalion, which was following, had to be brought up, and later also companies of the other two battalions of the brigade. By 4 p.m., however, the 26th Brigade was up alongside the 28th, holding, in fact, most of the divisional front, and the Belgians on the left were abreast of the British.

On the extreme right of the Second Army, in the XV Corps area, patrols were pushed forward in the afternoon of the 14th, and, Comines appearing to be abandoned, those of the 29/Durham L.I. (41st Brigade) of the 14th Division, using a bridge thrown near the bend of the Lys below Comines, crossed the river and passing clear of the town, after a 30-minute trench-mortar bombardment established a small bridgehead about a thousand yards east of it. Heavy shelling, however, forced the patrols to withdraw.

Besides the ground gained, over six thousand prisoners had been captured by the Allies, of which the British share was about two thousand " with more coming in ".

Some slight changes of frontage were made during the night of the 14th/15th, both the 14th and 34th Divisions taking over a little ground from the divisions on their left.

Operations were resumed on the 15th by all the Allies. The orders of the XV, X and XIX Corps were to the general effect that they should consolidate their positions and push forward patrols to keep touch with the enemy and establish bridgeheads on the Lys, if possible " without undue loss ". In the II Corps, all three divisions were to attack at 9 a.m., to conform to the Belgian zero hour, supported by as much artillery as could be got forward in the night ; they were to gain the Courtrai–Roulers railway, the previous day's objective, and then exploit success by seizing crossings over the Lys. It was later settled that the 35th Division, the left of the XIX Corps, should co-operate in this attack.

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Again in the north the left of the British Second Army and the Belgian Southern Groupement made the best progress, yet in the whole of the II Corps sector the opposition at first was stiff, lessening as the day wore on, although no deliberate retirement took place. The opposition offered to the three right corps was not strong, for the Germans opposite that wing were at least preparing to withdraw, although it was not until evening that a retirement could be definitely reported. An important strategic success was gained by the XV Corps, whose troops crossed the Lys and established a bridgehead from the entry of the Basse Deule to beyond Comines. This success made the subsequent sweeping of the enemy from the right (southern) bank of the Lys an easy affair, and any danger to the right flank of the Second Army in the movement was removed by the retirement of the German *Sixth Army* on the 15th, pursued by the Fifth Army, which thus was able to keep abreast of the Second.[1]

The operations of the XV Corps, being the most important, will be described first. At a XV Corps conference a north-south line beyond the Lys, Perenchies–Quesnoy–Hill Paul Bucq, had been given by Lieut.-General Sir B. de Lisle as the general objective, and the use of strong patrols, supported by artillery, recommended as the method of reaching it; and each of the three divisional commanders had stated his plans for carrying out the advance.

At 4.35 a.m. the 41st Brigade (14th Division) began the crossing of the Lys on either side of Comines under a barrage which had opened five minutes earlier. North of the town, near Godshuis, two bridges had been thrown on the previous day, and though one had been damaged the other was intact; under cover of machine-gun fire, two others were now thrown south of the town near Blanche Farm. By the southernmost bridge a company of the 33/London crossed about 6.30 a.m., the German party at the farm surrendering, and this enabled another company to cross at the other bridge where the defenders had shown more spirit. By 11 a.m. the battalion was extended along a light railway about three-quarters of a mile from the river, covering its

[1] See Note at end of Chapter. The German *Sixth Army* began withdrawing from in front of the Fifth Army, on the right of the Second, early on the 15th. See Chapter XXV.

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bridges. The 29/Durham L.I. crossed at the northern pair of bridges without opposition or artillery retaliation, and after searching Comines without finding any Germans there, worked its way forward to the same line as the 33/London, arriving there at about the same hour. In the afternoon two companies of the 6/Cheshire (21st Brigade, 30th Division) forced a passage south of Wervicq, and by 8.30 p.m. were just short of the crest of Hill Paul Bucq.

On the right of the 14th Division a platoon of the 10/East Yorkshire (31st Division) had crossed the river on a raft at 3 a.m. and established posts on the east bank opposite the Sugar Refinery south of Warneton, although the enemy was still in the trenches about five hundred yards away on the Deulemont–Warneton road. It was not until the afternoon, twelve hours later, that the remainder of the company was able to cross, and it then advanced under a barrage to the road and formed posts there. At 5.30 p.m. another company crossed and established posts east of Deulemont; the 11/East Yorkshire followed and, passing through the 10/East Yorkshire, formed a line from Deulemont to the 14th Division front.

Farther to the right again, the 8/Royal Irish (121st Brigade, 40th Division), already over the Lys at Houplines, at 5.30 a.m. sent three patrols to find if the enemy was still holding his trenches. They encountered strong resistance, against which artillery was turned; but it was not until 4.30 p.m. that the remainder of the battalion was able to push on, swinging forward a mile on the left.

On the X Corps front explosions were heard and fires seen in Menin during the night, and in the early morning Halluin was seen to be in flames. Against machine-gun and artillery fire patrols were pushed by the 30th and 34th Divisions to the northern bank of the Lys, except on the left where progress was blocked by Wevelghem. Menin, entered at 9 a.m., was found evacuated, but all the bridges were down, and it was not until after midnight that the 200th Field Company R.E. could form a pontoon bridge below Bousbecque, not without considerable difficulty owing to enemy 8-inch howitzer fire. Both the 30th and 34th Divisions issued orders late at night for at least patrols to cross the river and keep touch with the enemy, but these could not be acted upon until the 16th.

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The attack of the 35th Division (XIX Corps) and II Corps at 9 a.m. was covered on the right by the 124th Brigade (41st Division) which met with considerable opposition from snipers and machine guns, especially from Wevelghem, but eventually it reached the outskirts of the village. Its new front was actually in the 34th Division area, whose troops had not extended so far north, and so this was handed back to them during the night. The advance of the 105th and 104th Brigades of the 35th Division went well, and by 10 a.m., or soon after, they were on the low ridge marked by the Wevelghem–Gulleghem road, with the left forward at Poeselhoek. At 1.50 p.m. divisional orders to consolidate the line and patrol vigorously towards the Lys were received. Orders subsequently arrived to co-operate in a 3.30 p.m. attack of the 36th Division to secure passages over the Lys, but they were too late to be acted upon, which, in the event, was fortunate, as the attack did not take place.

The advance of the 107th and 109th Brigades of the 36th Division (II Corps) was delayed by the thick belts of wire around Gulleghem and by gas shelling, but before 11 a.m. the 1/R. Irish Rifles and 2/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers were on a line east of the village.[1] The 9/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers (109th Brigade) then passed through, and, after street fighting in Heule, reached its objective, the railway. The 2/Inniskilling (107th Brigade), after entering Gulleghem, was checked by machine guns, and it was not until 3.30 p.m., after the divisional artillery had silenced the machine guns, that the advance was continued to the railway. Brigade orders were received by telephone at 8.15 p.m. for the 1/R. Irish Rifles to form a defensive flank between the railway and the 35th Division, and the battalion was recalled for this purpose ; the 2/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers, which had begun to clear the ground towards the river was also withdrawn to the railway.

The 87th Brigade passed through the 88th and 86th Brigades of the 29th Division to make the attack under an artillery barrage. It immediately came under a certain amount of artillery and trench-mortar fire, but the enemy's first line was carried and after a broad belt of wire had been negotiated, Salines was captured, the 1/Border Regiment

[1] Prisoners taken there belonged to the *40th Division* and the *6th* (dismounted) *Cavalry Division*.

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and 2/South Wales Borderers, which were leading, moving so fast that they ran into their own barrage. Until Gulleghem was taken, they were held up half a mile east of Salines, and then, though Heule had fallen, at the Bois de Heule, which, although attacked also by the 9th Division on the left, held out for a time. By 12.45 p.m., however, the railway was occupied. The 1/K.O.S.B., the third battalion of the brigade, was at 3 p.m. sent forward to make good the line of the Heulebeek, so as to connect with the 9th Division which had entered Cuerne, and by 6 p.m. it had formed bridgeheads at Watermolen and Old Mill.

The 11/Royal Scots (27th Brigade) led the advance of the 9th Division at the double under a barrage and a smoke screen, making for a rise called Hill 40 between Laage Kapel Wood and the Bois de Heule. It was believed that the former wood was clear of the enemy, but machine-gun fire was received from it, and it became necessary to turn from the objective in order to mop it up. This was speedily accomplished thanks to good leading, the advance was then resumed and, in spite of thick wire which was encountered, Hill 40 was soon taken. The 12/Royal Scots passed through to attack Steenbeek, which was under shell-fire and in flames. The enemy infantry, however, did not wait for the Royal Scots to close, and the battalion, passing round the village, reorganized and advanced through the Bois de Heule, picking up a few German machine guns and prisoners. The 11/Royal Scots now came on again on the left of the 12th. Little resistance was encountered until the Courtrai–Roulers railway was approached ; then the forward guns gave help and progress was maintained. By noon both battalions had reached the railway and still moving on, by 3.30 p.m. were on the Courtrai–Bruges road, two thousand yards beyond it, and two hours later on the line Cuerne–Abeelhock, more than a mile farther, although the Belgians on the left were not keeping up. Harlebeke, the goal of the left of the Second Army as fixed by the G.A.F., was now less than a mile ahead, with the Lys interposing. Information given by inhabitants, and the resistance offered to patrols, seemed to indicate that a hasty attack had little chance of success ; so, after testing the defence and finding a bridgehead covering the town and trenches along the railway on the eastern bank of the Lys, further advance was postponed until next morning.

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Maréchal Foch appeared dissatisfied with the poor performance of the French contingent, which, according to the G.A.F. report,[1] had advanced only 4 kilometres in two days, whilst the Belgian Southern Groupement and the British on their right had gained 10 kilometres,[2] and he informed Sir Douglas Haig that a French Army, the Sixth, would be formed under General de Boissoudy, consisting of the VII and XXXIV Corps, then in the line, and the XXX Corps (5th[3] and 132nd Divisions, under General Peney). By the morning of the 19th the Sixth Army was in the line, the VII Corps taking over from the Belgian Southern Groupement, and the XXX Corps coming up in its place.

NOTE I

THE FRENCH AND BELGIANS IN FLANDERS, 14TH–15TH OCTOBER

(Sketch 23)

The general progress made can at once be seen from the sketch map, which, however, does not show quite the final position reached by British and Belgians each day. The French official account admits the better progress made by the Belgians, and the "feeble progress" of some of the French divisions, suggesting that "the large number of machine guns in the front line and the "multitude of centres of resistance . . . slowed up the forward "movement".

No history of the Belgian operation is yet printed, but from a typescript account kindly forwarded by the Belgian Historical Section, it appears that the success of the Belgians was due to the good barrages and to the rapid advance of the infantry, which forced the German batteries to cease fire and retire. The 3rd Division, on the right next to the British, was hampered by the 2nd Division, on its left, being held up in the morning, but it eventually reached Bavinchove (1¼ miles north of Harlebeke), in touch with the British left.

[1] See Sketch 23.

[2] Actually 12, as the British were nearer Harlebeke than shown on the French situation map.

[3] The 5th came from the VII Corps, where it was replaced by the 164th, in reserve; the 132nd and the corps staff came from the Tenth Army.

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NOTE II

The Germans in Flanders, 14th–15th October

(End-paper A ; Sketch 23)

The successful advances of the British Fourth, Third and First Armies in the period 3rd to 11th October which had brought them to the river Selle had endangered the left of the German *Sixth Army*, opposite the British Fifth Army, and the retirement of this Army had been sanctioned on the 12th.[1] The actual order for retirement was issued at midday on the 14th, in consequence of the break in in Flanders, which endangered its right, and the movement began in the early morning of the 15th.

During the 15th the German *Fourth Army* was forced back still farther, and at night Crown Prince Rupprecht ordered " the " retirement of the centre of the Army to an already prepared " position east of Thourout–Roulers and southward to Menin". (Schwarte, p. 385).

Crown Prince Rupprecht must—as often happened—have been misinformed as to the extent of the German disaster, for both Menin and Roulers and ground beyond them were, as may be seen on Sketch 23, already in possession of the Allies, who were also at the gates of Thourout. Actually the *Fourth Army* went back to the Bruges–Thielt position which ran " partly behind the " Blankenberg canal [which runs N.N.W. from Bruges to the sea]— " west edge of Bruges—west edge of Thielt in the direction " of Courtrai ".

" On the northern wing the *Marine Corps* began its retreat on " Ghent ".

The Allied success is attributed (Schwarte, p. 585) to overwhelming numbers—a delusion—and the copious (*ausgiebig*) use of tanks—of which there were none present.

[1] See Chapter XXVI.

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CHAPTER XIX

BATTLE OF COURTRAI (*concluded*)

SECOND ARMY

16TH–19TH OCTOBER[1]

(End-Paper A ; Sketches 23, 24)

General Plumer's conditional instructions of the 11th October[2] now took effect. All was going well—even better than expected—for the Germans in front of the Fifth Army had begun to retire on the 15th.[3] The corps were therefore to establish bridgeheads on the south side of the Lys. All three divisions of the right corps, the XV (Lieut.-General Sir B. de Lisle), were indeed already over the river on the 15th, except the right of the 31st Division and the left of the 14th, and during the night the right of the 92nd Brigade, which was holding the front of the 31st Division, crossed the river by rafts unopposed. As a result of the operations on the 16th the whole XV Corps, its left pivoting on Bousbecque on the Lys (between Comines and Halluin), swung forward its right, in conjunction with the Fifth Army, over five miles beyond the contemplated objective, whilst the rest of the Army closed up to the Lys.

Information collected from prisoners of war and others confirmed that 19 enemy divisions had been engaged on the Flanders front, and pointed to a German retirement to the line of the Schelde ; a captured order showed that a position behind the Bossuyt–Courtrai canal had been reconnoitred and marked out, and repatriated civilians reported that work was being done in places about a thousand yards behind the canal. The enemy offered continued resistance to the two northern (XIX and II) corps, pivoting on Courtrai, whilst, opposite the southern portion of the Second Army and the Fifth Army, he evacuated the Lille area and made a general withdrawal, covered by strong detachments of all arms. Bad weather conditions prevented more than slight air activity.

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[1] See Sketch 24.
[2] See p. 271.
[3] See Chapter XXVI.

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In the period dealt with in this chapter the heavy howitzers and long-range guns of the II Corps engaged targets south of the Lys, and its field artillery, 6-inch howitzers and 60-pdrs., carried out harassing fire and engaged selected targets at the request of the infantry. The artillery of the other corps moved forward as it could in conformity with the advance of the infantry, as soon as bridges over the Lys were ready for it.

During the 16th and 17th the advanced guards of the 40th and 31st Divisions (XV Corps), furnished by the 121st and 92nd Brigades, met no enemy whatsoever, but when they moved forward at 1.15 a.m. on the 17th they learned that the Germans had been gone only a few hours, and that their departure had been so sudden that very few bridges had been destroyed. The 121st Brigade, now confronted by Roubaix, halted in touch with the Fifth Army, but the 92nd went forward to within a couple of thousand yards of Tourcoing, and, as indication that the enemy was withdrawing, or had already gone, aircraft which flew over that town and over Roubaix received no fire.

The 14th Division having relieved the 21st Brigade (30th Division) now had both the 42nd and 43rd Brigades in the line on the 16th. Patrols early discovered that the villages opposite the front and Hill Paul Bucq were unoccupied, and at 11.15 a.m. divisional orders were issued for an advance to the line le Blaton–Bousbecque (exclusive), about three miles away : if much resistance was encountered an organized attack would be made at 5 p.m. No enemy was met with by the 14th Division until le Blaton was reached about 5 p.m., and by 9 p.m. this had been overcome. On the 17th the 43rd Brigade covered the whole divisional front, and its advance was at first held up by the wire of a trench, the Linselles Switch, still held by machine guns and a few field guns. As a result of a corps conference, at 9.20 a.m. it had been decided to press on, and at midday the 14th Division was ordered forward to a new general corps line through Roncq. But a delay of nearly three hours took place whilst this order was reaching its destination, and, the enemy still continuing to offer resistance, it was 10.20 p.m. before the objective was reached by the 43rd Brigade.

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In the X Corps (Lieut.-General R. B. Stephens), the 30th Division had only the 90th Brigade in the line. At 2 a.m. on the 16th the 2/15th London crossed the Lys by a damaged bridge near Wervicq and, working downstream, occupied Bousbecque to cover bridge construction; the enemy then shelled the village and neighbourhood heavily, using a proportion of gas; although he failed to destroy a bridge which had been thrown, patrols which tried to advance from Bousbecque were checked by accurate machine-gun fire from Linselles Switch.

Thus by the close of the 16th the right four divisions of the Second Army held a line facing east from the Army boundary to the Lys at Bousbecque, but on their left the rest of the Army was still on the north bank of the river.

The 34th Division had all three brigades in the line opposite the reach between Halluin (believed to be occupied) and Wevelghem (reported clear), with one company dug in across the bend of the Lys just east of Menin (Marathon bridge). During the night (15th/16th), patrols of the 102nd and 103rd Brigades crossed by the remains of this bridge and by a ferry pontoon and, advancing about twelve hundred yards, surprised two machine-gun posts. One patrol found some barges from which a rough bridge was formed, but reinforcements sent across found it impossible to advance owing to machine-gun fire and were withdrawn, and the bridges were then broken by enemy gun-fire. The 101st Brigade, on the left, cleared Wevelghem, but could not cross the Lys.

During the night of the 16th/17th the enemy on the front of the 30th and 34th Divisions retired, but a few of his machine guns fired until 6 a.m. The difficulties of the 90th Brigade (30th Division), which had taken over the additional frontage of the 102nd Brigade (34th Division), in following him up were due to the Lys being too broad and deep here for the bridging material which could be procured, so that the troops had to be ferried over on duckboard rafts by twos and threes, but by 5 p.m. the divisional objective, the high ground east of Halluin, had been secured and outposts set beyond it.

The brigades of the 34th Division were also delayed, the 103rd by having to cross by broken bridges and the 101st

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by small rafts, but by 2 p.m. Lauwe had been cleared and the French flag could be seen flying on the church tower of Reckem in the divisional objective, which was reached about 5 p.m. without opposition worth mention. Except in one village fifteen hundred yards to the east, no sign of the enemy could be found on the 34th Division front. During the 17th, therefore, the X Corps had joined the XV Corps south of the Lys, the southern bank of which had been cleared from Bousbecque to Lauwe, a distance of six miles.

The XIX and II Corps could do no more during the 16th and 17th than close up to the Lys. The XIX Corps had only the 35th Division in the line and its 106th Brigade, which attacked under a barrage at 5.30 a.m. on the 16th, managed to advance to within half a mile of the river, the last thousand yards under fire, but it could not cross the intervening ground, which was dead flat; arrangements therefore were made to force a passage on the night of the 17th/18th.

In the II Corps the 108th Brigade of the 36th Division, moving through the suburbs of Courtrai, succeeded in approaching close to the river bank, and at 2.30 p.m. (16th) a party of the 9/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers crossed into Courtrai by a pontoon bridge built by the engineers under a smoke screen, though at the cost of heavy casualties, and established a small bridgehead. The bridge was destroyed by gun-fire and at 6 p.m. the party was withdrawn. The 36th Division was then relieved by the 41st Division, XIX Corps.

The 87th Brigade, of the 29th Division, which had two tiny bridgeheads, made arrangements to cross in support of the 9th Division, but the project was abandoned owing to the difficulties of bridge building. A counter-attack was made in the afternoon of the 17th against the bridgeheads, but, although it was repulsed, the troops holding them were withdrawn during the night.

In the 9th Division, after bombardments at 2 p.m., 3.30 p.m. and 5 p.m. of the houses on the Courtrai–Harlebeke road held by the enemy, the 11/Royal Scots and 6/K.O.S.B. of the 27th Brigade, at 8 p.m. attempted the passage of the Lys. The latter battalion only was successful, crossing by a single bridge, but it could not force an entry into Harlebeke. It was repeatedly counter-attacked; at midnight—after

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which the 12/Royal Scots was gradually sent over to reinforce—at dawn (17th), at 4.30 p.m. and 5.35 p.m. Well supported by artillery, the two battalions held their ground. During the enemy bombardment at 4.30 p.m. the bridges were destroyed, but after dark a barrel bridge was completed by men of the 63rd Field Company, R.E. and the 9/Seaforth Highlanders (Pioneers); and the Royal Scots were then withdrawn.

On the 16th the British liaison officer at the headquarters of the Group of Armies of Flanders reported to G.H.Q. that H.M. the King of the Belgians was dissatisfied with the efforts of the French contingent, which was not fighting, and that he wished to stop the offensive. On the same day, as evidence of change of plan, King Albert issued an order, which reached General Plumer on the morning of the 17th, altering the rôle of the latter's Army and authorizing the action that he had already taken. The Second Army was no longer to be merely a flank guard: the XV Corps with the X co-operating, was to push eastwards as rapidly as possible south of the Lys, keeping touch with the Fifth Army: the XIX and II Corps were to maintain their present position, but to clear enemy detachments from the vicinity of the river Lys and of the town of Courtrai: the X, XIX and II Corps were not to make any extended movement southwards (the X had already done so), but to rest and economize troops.

General Plumer again ignored the orders of G.A.F. and at 7.25 p.m. (17th) directed the XV and X Corps to advance to the Tournai–Courtrai railway, with Sterhoek as point of junction, whilst the XIX and II Corps were to make all preparations to cross the Lys when the situation demanded. By direction of the G.A.F. he ordered the II Corps to extend its left during the night of the 18th/19th and relieve the Belgian Army as far as the junction of the Lys and the Roulers canal.

On the 18th progress was maintained on the same lines as the two previous days, the left wheel of the Second Army being continued, and Roubaix and Tourcoing liberated;

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at the same time the pivot of the wheel was advanced, so that it lay south of Courtrai. The divisions each sent forward one brigade as advanced guard, which in their turn each used one battalion, with cyclists, to do what fighting was necessary. In most cases a 5.30 to 6 a.m. start was made, with a thick mist lying over the Lys, and enemy resistance was slight except at Mouscron in the 14th Division area.

In the 40th Division (Major-General Sir W. E. Peyton) the 121st Brigade (Br.-General G. C. Stubbs) met with no opposition, but its main body was delayed at the Basse Deule canal, which it had to cross by a footbridge, the water being too low for the use of pontoons. After a pause from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. the brigade went on through the southern part of Roubaix and occupied the line of the Lille–Roubaix railway, a little ahead of the front of the Fifth Army.

The 92nd Brigade of the 31st Division passed through Tourcoing without opposition, but on the vanguard reaching the outlying village of Wattrelos both gun and machine-gun fire was received, and the enemy rear guards appeared to be holding the line of the Tournai–Herseaux–Mouscron railway. After some patrol fighting they were driven off, Herseaux being cleared, and the railway line, the objective, was occupied.

The 43rd Brigade of the 14th Division did not begin to advance until 10 a.m., and met with no resistance until Mouscron was entered, when the enemy was found holding the railway at its eastern end strongly. It was not until 11 p.m. that the 20/Middlesex and 10/Highland L.I., after heavy fighting, secured the railway; resistance then gradually diminished, and at dawn patrols could not find an enemy within two thousand yards.

On the X Corps front the daily hostile artillery fire was conspicuously absent, and the German infantry, according to information received, had withdrawn a considerable distance. Only a few mounted patrols were seen during the morning, and the progress of the 30th and 34th Divisions, led by the 90th and 101st Brigades, was at first easy, though Marcke, on the left flank (in the XIX Corps area and not captured until after midnight), was still held by the enemy. Some machine-gun fire and shelling was encountered on reaching the Tourcoing–Courtrai railway about 12.30 p.m., and a halt had to be made until 4.30 p.m. when a further

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advance under artillery support was attempted without much result, but as it grew dark patrols had no great difficulty in establishing a line on the objective, the Tourcoing –Courtrai road.

In the XIX Corps the forcing of the Lys was postponed, as the bridging arrangements were incomplete, but at 12.30 a.m. (18th) a strong fighting patrol of two platoons of the 17/Royal Scots (106th Brigade, 35th Division) was sent over to investigate. After it had captured one post the garrisons of the others nearby fled, and the patrol returned with three prisoners, without having suffered a casualty.

The corps, however, telegraphed to the 35th Division that an attempt should be made to capture Marcke, in order to assist the X Corps, and the 106th Brigade was then directed to dribble men across the Lys, only a single plank bridge being available, and attack the village at 10 p.m. under cover of a barrage. The 17/Royal Scots successfully carried out the operation and by 3.30 a.m. (19th) had secured all its objectives and 24 prisoners—there would have been more had not the Germans fled—at a cost of three men wounded. The 104th Brigade, which had been ordered to support the 106th on the left, its bridges having been completed, had all three battalions across the Lys by dawn (19th), and at 5.30 a.m. attacked under a barrage. There was practically no resistance, and by 7 a.m. the Tourcoing–Courtrai road had been reached and passed.

The divisions of the II Corps were not in action, being under orders to make all preparations to force the passage of the Lys on the night of the 19th/20th. The four thousand yards of the Belgian front was taken over by the 9th Division extending slightly and the 36th Division being brought into the line on its left.

On the 19th October further progress was made. Courtrai was regained, and by the early hours of the 20th the whole front of the Second Army was across the Lys. Some changes took place in the distribution of troops : the frontage of the 40th Division—which went into reserve—was taken over partly by the 59th Division (Fifth Army) and partly by the 31st Division, which side stepped to the right ; the last of

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the Belgian Southern Detachment was withdrawn, so that the contingents of the G.A.F. were now in the order: British Second Army, French Sixth Army[1] and Belgian Army.

On the right in the XV Corps, the 93rd and 92nd Brigades encountered no resistance except at Toufflers, soon after the start at 8 a.m., where 3 prisoners were taken. On reaching the Tournai–Mouscron railway in the evening the brigade halted in touch with the Fifth Army, with scouts well to the front.

The 43rd Brigade of the 14th Division also continued the advance at 8 a.m. It reached the objective assigned to it without opposition, and at 11.30 a.m. the divisional commander gave the brigadier verbal orders to continue the advance to another line just short of Dottignies, which it carried out at 4.30 p.m., again without opposition. The patrols which entered Dottignies found it evacuated.

The 30th and 34th Divisions of the X Corps, with the 90th and 101st Brigades as advanced guards, starting at 8.30 a.m., at first made rapid progress. The only resistance came from some machine guns in Belleghem, with some shelling of the road from Aelbeke to that village, when the leading troops were approaching the first objective, the north-south road through Rolleghem. The enemy appeared to be in position about Ruddervoorde–Belleghem, and during the afternoon his artillery fire, especially on Rolleghem, became heavy. In an attack on this position about 4 p.m., with a small amount of artillery support from sections of batteries, the fight was continued until 1 a.m. (20th), when the 2/L. North Lancashire (101st Brigade), on the left, took Belleghem; but on the right the Germans clung to Ruddervoorde and enfilade fire from the south prevented much progress.

In the 35th Division of the XIX Corps, the 106th and 104th Brigades, after taking Marcke and the ridge to the north in the early morning, continued on to the Tournai–Courtrai road, and in the afternoon patrols entered Courtrai and took some prisoners and machine guns. Although the enemy, who was holding a line about a mile to the east of the

[1] See p. 281.

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town[1], shelled the bridges—fortunately without effect—the batteries of the division began crossing the Lys at 11 a.m.

About that hour the 123rd Brigade, the leading brigade of the 41st Division, was instructed to bridge the Lys at the north-east corner of Courtrai that night. Endeavours to cross were already being made, and by 1.5 p.m. the 11/Queen's by means of boats, despite some shelling, had its scouts and half a company across, and the rest, as well as two machine-gun companies, followed; the battalion then pushed on and over the Courtrai–Ghent railway, to find the enemy's line some five hundred yards ahead. By 2.35 p.m. the 23/Middlesex, on the right of the Queen's had two companies over, and Courtrai was found clear of the enemy, but the town was subjected to some scattered shelling from him.

The II Corps was able to get troops of all its three divisions across the Lys. Of the 29th Division the 2/Hampshire (88th Brigade) crossed between 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. by means of four ferries. Of the 9th Division the 5/Camerons (26th Brigade) and 9/Scottish Rifles and 2/R. Scots Fusiliers (28th Brigade), under a protective artillery barrage, starting at 11.15 p.m., the 26th Brigade, using only two boats and three rafts, and the 28th a footbridge in addition, carried out the crossing with a total loss of 1 officer and 6 men wounded, and 12 gassed on the way up to the river. By 3 a.m. the 9th Division was in line alongside the 29th and had mopped up Harlebeke.

In the 36th Division, the 109th Brigade led, and two companies of the 9/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers were ferried over in pontoons at 7 p.m. with only one casualty: the other two companies followed over a footbridge constructed in the meantime. The 1/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers crossed at 9.30 p.m. by a bridge just completed, and without a casualty, in spite of considerable shelling. By 4 a.m. (20th) the two battalions, although subjected to machine-gun fire, had nearly reached the objective, the line marked by the villages of Spriete and Straate, but failed to enter Dries, which lies between them. A most determined counter-attack, which left twenty-five Germans dead on the field, was repelled.

[1] The Courtrai Switch between the Schelde and Lys.

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At 2 a.m. the 107th Brigade had begun crossing, with instructions to relieve the 109th Brigade, which was to become flank guard, as it was understood that the French on the left, who had only reached the line of the Lys on the evening of the 19th, did not intend to advance on the 20th.[1]

On this day (19th) Maréchal Foch issued his last General Directive, in which the Group of Armies of Flanders was instructed to march in the general direction of Brussels.[2] On receipt of this, H.M. King Albert, at 7 p.m. issued his orders to the G.A.F. : it was essential that the Armies should act with speed,[3] crossing the Lys and the Deynze–Ecloo canal on the heels of the enemy, so as to deny him time to organize any resistance on these water-lines : if, however, it should prove impossible to prevent this, the principal part in dislodging him would fall to the British Second Army, which had already crossed the Lys above Courtrai, " its " rapid advance towards the Schelde, right wing leading, " should result in the plateaux between the Lys and the " Schelde being captured one after the other, and thus " allow first the French Sixth Army and then the Belgian " Army to debouch " : without, however, waiting for the result of the British operations and to hasten (*précipiter*) them, the French Sixth Army should, in accordance with its original task, form as many bridgeheads as possible across the Lys—here the order went into detail unnecessary in instructing Army commanders—" as far as the road or the "railway from Courtrai to Deynze,"[4] the most favourable " zone of attack being the loops of the Lys between Wacken "and Gotthem" (11 and 14 miles below Courtrai respectively) : the Belgian Army should also try to force a passage over the Deynze–Ecloo canal at the most favourable place ; the cavalry would clear (*balayer*) the plain between the Lys and the Schelde and seize points of passage on the latter river : having crossed, it would use its main bodies against important communication junctions, and then march on Namur as general advanced guard of the G.A.F.

[1] And they did not.

[2] The General Directive is given in Chapter XXI, p. 324.

[3] See Sketch 23.

[4] These are nearly parallel to the river.

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NOTE I

The French and Belgians in Flanders 16th–19th October

(Sketch 23)

" On the night of the 15th/16th the German forces operating " in Flanders, having lost the battle of Roulers, broke contact " and retired eastwards. The pursuit was immediately begun ". (F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 218.) The Belgian account, however, states that the Northern Detachment had heavy fighting, after a 30-minute bombardment, and did not enter Thourout, only a mile from the jumping-off line, until 6 p.m. (16th). On the left wing the 5th and 7th Divisions, leaving the position held so long, crossed the Yser. " In the afternoon explosions and fires showed that " the enemy was destroying his great establishments near the " coast ". The advance made by the French and Belgians, according to Carte 7 in F.O.A. vii (ii), varied from one to three miles.

On the 17th " the Allied pressure continued " : the advance varied from a mile on the right to five miles on the left, the French left " finding itself in the presence of entrenched German units ". The Belgian cavalry reached the Bruges–Ostend canal and the Belgian 5th Division entered Ostend, so the general line ran N.N.W. from Courtrai past Thourout to Ostend.

On the 18th the French contingent failed to make progress ; the French VII Corps came up and took over from the Belgian Southern Detachment, and the Belgian Northern Detachment reached the Bruges–Ostend canal.

Reconnaissance during the night of the 18th/19th showed that the Germans had again made a retirement, this time to the Lys (the Lys Position) ; the French right and centre corps nearly reached the river between Harlebeke and Grammene ten miles below, whence the line ran N.N.W., the Belgians occupying Zeebrugge and entering Bruges (Bruges is due north of Courtrai).

NOTE II

The Germans During 16th–19th October

After sanctioning the retirement of the German *Sixth Army* (opposite the Fifth Army), which began on the 14th, and hearing that the *Fourth Army* (in Flanders) had been forced back, Ludendorff informed Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group that " in " view of an answer from President Wilson being expected shortly, a further retirement was undesirable " (Rupprecht ii, p. 461) ;

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in particular " it was important that the triangle of towns Lille–" Roubaix–Tourcoing should not be given up until it was abso-" lutely necessary, as if we are still in possession of these towns " until the armistice there were great hopes that Alsace and " Lorraine could be retained by the Reich ". When, however, Wilson's answer turned out " unsatisfactory ", at 6.40 p.m. on the 15th, Ludendorff said " there is no further object in holding " on to the Flemish coast and to Lille. Retirement may take " place ". At 3.10 a.m. on the 16th he ordered : " The Group of " Armies will retire according to plan to the Hermann Position ". It was intended to retire very gradually, in fact, on the morning of the 17th all three Armies of the Group (*Seventeenth*, *Sixth* and *Fourth*) reported that " a continuation of the retreat to-day is " not necessary ". But on this day the British Fourth Army broke into the Hermann Position. Apart from this, Crown Prince Rupprecht was very doubtful, " in view of the condition of our " troops, the lack of reserves and the completely unready state of " the position ", whether the northern portion could be held for more than a few days, and on the 18th ordered a retirement to it that evening. On the 19th Ludendorff still had hopes of an immediate armistice and directed that the Hermann–Lys Position should be held for at least eight days.

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CHAPTER XX

Battle of the Selle

The First Day: 17th October

The Fourth Army

(Sketches 25, 26)

From the 11th October,[1] after the issue of G.H.Q. preliminary orders for the resumption of the offensive, the deployment of artillery, the replenishment of ammunition and the other preparations of the Fourth Army for the attack of the Selle line went busily forward. On the 13th General Rawlinson issued artillery instructions, giving the scale of rounds per gun to be accumulated,[2] and directing that from the time of issue until zero hour, fixed on the 16th for 5.20 a.m. 17th October, vigorous counter-battery work was to be carried on. The bombardment by heavy howitzers of important localities, chosen by the corps, was also begun; harassing fire was continued on the enemy's communications, and Andigny Forest gassed; enfilade and cross-fire was specially maintained, each corps assisting its neighbours in this way; 6-inch guns, sited well forward, dealt with the crossings of the Sambre canal, behind which was the second German position.

The allotment of artillery was as follows:—

IX Corps (C.R.A., Br.-General G. Humphreys):

6th Division (C.R.A., Br.-General E. F. Delaforce): 8 brigades (1st, 6th, 32nd Division artillery and 2 Army brigades);

46th Division (Br.-General Sir S. H. Child): 6 brigades (46th Division artillery, 2 R.H.A. and 2 Army brigades);

Heavy Artillery (Br.-General G. B. Mackenzie): 7 Brigades R.G.A. (XII, XIV, XL, LXIX, LXXIX, LXXXIII and XCVIII) and 2 siege batteries (50th and 498th), with 4 150-mm. and 4 105-mm. howitzers captured from the Germans. In reserve were three siege batteries (80th, 499th and No. 1 R.M.A.).

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[1] See Sketch 25.

[2] 4·5-inch howitzer, 400. 6-inch howitzer, 300. 8-inch howitzer, 200, etc.

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American II Corps (C.R.A., Br.-General K. K. Knapp of the British VII Corps):

10 brigades of field artillery (2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Australian Divisions' artillery) and 2 Australian Army brigades.

Heavy Artillery (Br.-General F. H. Metcalfe): 8 brigades R.G.A. (IX, XVIII, XXI, XLI, LXVIII, LXXI, LXXII, LXXV) and 4 siege batteries (222nd, 312th, 499th and 504th).

XIII Corps (C.R.A., Br.-General R. A. C. Wellesley):

50th Division (under Br.-General K. J. Kincaid Smith): 5 brigades of field artillery;
(25th Division artillery and 3 Army brigades).

66th Division (C.R.A. Br.-General A. Birtwistle): 4 brigades of field artillery.
(18th Division artillery and 2 Army brigades).

Heavy Artillery (Br.-General J. D. Sherer), 5 brigades R.G.A. (XXIII, less 9·2-inch howitzer battery, XXVII and XLVII both less an 8-inch howitzer battery, LXXVI, LXXXIX) and 3 siege batteries, (189th, 312th, 545th).

To the bombardment the enemy replied by increased fire and by shelling the woods and villages in the forward area somewhat heavily.

The weather, as already mentioned, before the battle was unfavourable for air activity: on the 14th it was possible to carry out reconnaissances, but on the 15th and 16th mist and rain interfered and little useful flying could be done.[1]

The Selle formed the chief obstacle to the advance. While on the western side the slopes of the valleys are gentle and devoid of cover and obstructions, those on the eastern are rather abrupt and the country beyond is enclosed, presenting numerous orchards and grass fields bounded by thick hedges, which restricted view and impeded movement. A number of small valleys break the eastern slope: there is the one in which the railway runs to la Vallée Mulâtre, another from St. Benin towards l'Arbre Guernon, with two smaller ones between them, and a fifth from le Cateau southwards to le Quennelet Farm. The

[1] "War in the Air", Vol. VI, does not mention any air action on the Selle front between the 11th and the 16th.

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intermediate objective on the right and in the centre was just below the top of the slope up from the river, but on the left was on the eastern slopes of the l'Arbre Guernon–St. Benin valley. An important feature on the enemy's side, and favourable to him, was the high spur running down from Forest towards Montay: projecting as it did, it outflanked the valley of the Selle and the plateau on the eastern side of the river, and thus afforded opportunity both for observation and enfilade fire. The town of le Cateau, with a population of between ten and eleven thousand, also provided a useful bastion; its houses and factories were solidly built, and their cellars furnished admirable protection during bombardment. East of the town, the railway, either on embankment or in cutting, commanded the exits from it; round the station yard, on the eastern side of the line, was a bank thirty feet high, and the whole area of the yard, including a number of additional sidings put in by the Germans, had an edging of goods sheds, factories and other strongly constructed buildings suitable for defence. The mound gave good view to the south, and was surrounded by trees which served to mask it. The station was, indeed, a little fortress.

In the area of attack of both the flank corps, the IX and the XIII, certain special difficulties were discovered. In the case of the IX Corps it was the ridge running first northwards to Andigny les Fermes, and then north-westwards to Belle Vue, where it rose into a long knoll, here called Belle Vue ridge. An attack against it from the west entailed crossing a wide valley, whose northern end and side were held by the enemy. Lieut.-General Braithwaite, therefore, decided to attack the spur endways from the north-west. To get the necessary depth for the troops to form up for this operation, the corps boundary was shifted twelve hundred yards northward so as to include Vaux Andigny. In the case of the XIII Corps, the damming of the Selle by the enemy had increased its depth and expanded the flooded area on the front of the 50th Division, so that to cross it lengthy bridges would have to be constructed, naturally under close machine-gun fire. Farther south, near St. Souplet, on the front of the American II Corps, the stream was narrower and not a serious obstacle. The corps boundary was therefore extended about two thousand yards southward so that the 50th Division had approximately five hundred

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yards of river frontage on the south where a crossing was not too difficult.

The final orders for the attack, in co-operation with the French First Army, were issued on the 14th. They authorized the change of boundaries above mentioned, fixed the objectives, settled the barrages, announced that the infantry attack would be preceded by a bombardment commencing at 8 a.m. two days before and continuing until zero hour. As the time of advance from the first objective, they fixed 11.23 a.m. (six hours and three minutes after zero hour); and they allotted tank battalions: to the IX Corps, the 16th and the 6th (whippets); to the American II Corps, the 301st American; and to the XIII Corps, the 1st. The V Brigade R.A.F. was to cover the advance of the tanks to the starting line.

The objectives for the Army were ambitious, and it was not expected that the second one, 4 miles distant, would be reached on the first day; but it was felt at British G.H.Q.— as also at O.H.L. by Ludendorff[1]— that such was the demoralization of the German troops that their resistance might collapse at any time, and every effort must be made to exploit any initial success. Owing to a stream lying between the belligerents, a bandage on the eyes of both of them, the number of divisions of the *German Second Army* (whose front ran from about le Petit Verly, on the French First Army front, to north of Solesmes on the Third Army front) confronting the Fourth Army was not accurately known. The front line was estimated at only four comparatively fresh and two exhausted divisions, and it seemed probable that this *Army* would have to rely on its own reserves, which were twelve exhausted divisions, of which only one had had any real rest.[2] To turn this force out of a strong position were available: two American divisions, now weak in numbers, but with some experience of fighting, and four British (two of which, the 46th and 50th, had recently seen particularly hard fighting and were somewhat

[1] See Note II at end of Chapter XVII.

[2] Actually the Fourth Army encountered initially on the 17th five fresh and four fairly fresh divisions, and a tenth (the *221st*) appeared during the morning in the IX Corps sector. The sequence from south to north seemed to have been *5th Reserve, 15th Reserve, 29th, 3rd Naval* (at Molain), *54th, 204th* (north of St. Souplet), *243rd, 17th Reserve, 44th Reserve*. Three more, the *34th, 21st Reserve* and *119th* were close at hand.

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tired), with three (1st, 25th and 32nd the last of which was distinctly tired) in reserve; not one of the British divisions was fresh, and all were below establishment, though probably not so greatly as the German.

Information as regards the enemy obtained immediately prior to the attack, though not so complete as on previous occasions, seemed to justify a bold plan, especially as the Flanders Group was to attack on the 14th. The air reconnaissances on this day, which disclosed the unfinished state of the German defences, had also shown changes in rear of them which seemed to foreshadow further retirement: for instance, groups of new airfields were seen farther to the east than any built before, mainly north of Maubeuge and Bavai (20½ and 17 miles north-east and N.N.E. of le Cateau); also a number of new footbridges had been thrown across the Sambre and Oise canal. On the other hand, two excellent reasons existed for the enemy making every effort to check further progress of the Fourth and Third Armies: first, he must if possible keep their artillery out of range of the railway junction at Aulnoye (14 miles north-east of le Cateau) —where he had recently erected a number of hospitals; for its destruction would sever the main line of lateral communication behind the Hermann Position,[1] Valenciennes–Aulnoye–Avesnes–Hirson–Sedan. Secondly, he must gain time for his troops in the Laon–Reims area (*Seventh Army*) and Lens area (*Sixth Army*), in both of which retirements on a large scale had been begun, to carry out their movement. As the 17th approached, his divisions in the north were being hustled back by the British Fifth and Second Armies and the Belgians, which gave another reason for holding fast to the southern part of the Hermann Position.

The general plan of the IX Corps (Lieut.-General Sir W. P. Braithwaite)[2] was for the 46th and 6th Divisions (Major -Generals G. F. Boyd and T. O. Marden) to make the attack as far as the intermediate objective, where the 1st Division (Major-General E. P. Strickland) would pass through.

[1] See End-paper B.
[2] See Sketch 25.

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In the 46th Division, the 137th Brigade (Br.-General J. V. Campbell), held a frontage of nearly five thousand yards in Riquerval Wood with one battalion—the others being in divisional reserve in the southern outskirts of Bohain and along the road leading southwards from that village. The brigade was to maintain its position, but feign attack—for which dummy tanks and figures were provided—in the hope that by fixing the attention of the Germans on the wood a chance would be given for the other brigades to cut them off. The 139th and 138th Brigades (Br.-Generals J. Harington and F. G. M. Rowley) were assembled on a frontage of 1,500 yards immediately south of Vaux Andigny, part of which was taken over from the 6th Division. They were to advance straight to their front, that is south-eastwards, and clear the valley west of the Belle Vue ridge, including Andigny les Fermes, and further form a defensive flank facing south a little south of the Regnicourt–Andigny les Fermes road, ready to check any enemy counter-attack through Andigny Forest against the 137th Brigade.

The 18th and 16th Brigades (Br.-Generals G. S. G. Craufurd and P. W. Brown of the 71st Brigade)[1] of the 6th Division, were to form up in the eastern outskirts of Vaux Andigny on a frontage of fifteen hundred yards, with the 71st Brigade (under Lieut.-Colonel F. Latham, 1/Leicestershire) in reserve at Bohain. They were to capture : the 18th, Belle Vue ridge, and the 16th, the intermediate objective from Andigny les Fermes (exclusive) up to the corps boundary near the Molain road, the frontage of the two brigades thus expanding to five thousand yards.

It was necessary for the two attacking brigades of the 1st Division to follow closely the troops of the 6th Division, through which they were to pass, as the barrage would pause only half an hour in front of the intermediate objective. They, therefore, were forced to assemble immediately in rear of the 18th and 16th Brigades of the 6th Division. Thus five brigades, besides American troops, would be in the neighbourhood of Vaux Andigny, where the area west of the village consisted for the most part of a wood, mainly of not very thick low scrub and undergrowth, but nevertheless an obstacle in night work.

[1] Br.-General H. A. Walker of the 16th had been seriously wounded during the night of the 16th/17th.

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The deployment of the artillery also presented a problem; for the best positions from which the south-eastward advance of the 139th and 138th Brigades could be supported were required by the 6th and the American 30th Divisions; the batteries had therefore to be placed north of Bohain, and they fired as nearly as possible in enfilade of the attack in two parallel belts, which leap-frogged each other alternately.

Although the moon wanted only three days to full, the night was dark, and as it wore on a thick mist developed. In spite of difficulties, as in the case of the similarly congested assembly of the 1st Canadian Division near Denain on the 8th August, and notwithstanding the enemy indulging in high explosive and gas shellings, the forming up was successfully accomplished. But in the fighting which ensued, owing to the mist, which at first limited visibility to five yards, and the barrage being of an unusual form not as easy to follow as a creeping one, some confusion arose, and, in spite of the use of compasses, small bodies of all the attacking divisions wandered out of their brigade, and even out of their divisional sectors.

The feigned attack of the 137th Brigade, supported by the barrage fire of the XVI Army Brigade R.H.A., and machine guns, was completely successful. The enemy opened a counter-barrage containing many gas shells, which merely compelled the 6/North Staffordshire, the one battalion in the line, but wisely withdrawn before zero hour from the actual front line, to put on gas masks. At 7.30 a.m. this battalion sent strong patrols through Riquerval Wood and shortly after midday, in spite of snipers and machine guns, it gained touch with the French XV Corps east of Retheuil Farm. By 4.30 p.m. it had cleared the western end of Andigny Forest (generally called "Hennechies Wood" in the records) up to the Forester's House, and regained touch with the French there and with the 139th Brigade on the left.

The attack of the 139th Brigade was made on a front of one battalion, the 8/Sherwood Foresters leading. At first all went well and many prisoners were taken, but then the battalion, losing direction in the mist, split in two, the left drifting off to Andigny les Fermes. Thus Regnicourt on a rise of ground, and the copses to the north-west were left untouched, and fire from them and from machine-gun nests, overrun in the mist, now began to gall the attackers. Every straggler who

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could be collected, about a hundred and fifty in all, was sent up by the battalion commander to fill the gap; the left wing closed in again; the two supporting companies of the 5/South Staffordshire came up, and, with the eventual assistance of the right wing, which in its turn had diverged southwards, and of the section of three tanks attached to the division (one of which was put out of action by a shell), the copses and the village of Regnicourt were taken together with 140 prisoners and 27 machine guns. By 10.15 a.m., with the aid of the remaining two companies of the 5/South Staffordshire, the defensive flank of the intermediate objective had been formed. A single enemy gun, firing at point-blank range from the edge of Hennechies Wood gave trouble for a short time and, as warning of what was to come, at 11 a.m. Germans were seen a mile south-east of Regnicourt massing for counter-attack. All guns were turned on this target, and only one German succeeded in reaching the infantry position alive. Patrols of the 139th Brigade then entered Hennechies Wood, and, under their pressure and that of the 137th Brigade, the enemy, leaving only a few machine-gun posts, evacuated it. By evening a north-south outpost line had been formed half a mile east of Regnicourt.[1]

The 138th Brigade, like the 139th, had difficulty in keeping direction but, overrunning the enemy's wire and trenches, the 4th and 5/Lincolnshire were on the intermediate line by 8 a.m. They were, however, too much to the right, and thus it was that some of the men entered Regnicourt, whilst on the left Andigny les Fermes remained in enemy hands. On this latter flank, the 6th Division had been unable to capture Bellevue ridge, but about 9 a.m. the 1st Division cleared it. The flank of the 46th Division was thus secured and the divisional measures in preparation to guard it became unnecessary. Under pressure of the 1st Division the enemy withdrew from Andigny les Fermes and by 3.30 p.m. a line of platoon strongpoints had been established on the southern side of the village with outposts in front. Later, as the advance of the French made a defensive right flank unnecessary, the 46th Division line was extended northwards to the east of Mal Assise Farm, in relief of the 1st Division. A company of the 5/Leicestershire (138th

[1] The 139th Brigade losses had been seven officers and 200 other ranks, and it had captured 250 prisoners and over a hundred machine guns.

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Brigade), moving southwards from Andigny les Fermes after dusk to get in touch with the French at la Nation, found none there, and was itself attacked. Patrols were then pushed towards Mennevret all through the night, but it was not until 5.30 a.m. that definite contact was established with the French XV Corps at la Nation.[1]

The five tanks with the 18th Brigade (6th Division) soon knocked out the machine guns defending Vaux Andigny railway station, but, finding uncut wire and enclosures east of the village, both the leading battalions detailed to capture Belle Vue ridge lost their way, and consequently the barrage. The right, misled by the sound of the attached section of tanks, which had also lost its way, wandered off to the south and thus it was that it reached Regnicourt; the left, drifting northwards, came under fire from Angin Farm and was checked; part of the centre, finding a trench, bombed down it southwards. In the outcome, Belle Vue buildings and a trench west of them were taken, although a strongpoint at a shrine nearby was overlooked in the mist. The advance then came to a standstill and, before the brigade reserve could arrive to give a fresh impetus, the 1st Division passed through the 6th Division, took the shrine, as will be related, and relieved the situation, so that by midday the 18th Brigade was digging in on the intermediate objective.

The 16th Brigade proceeded according to plan, the railway from Vaux Andigny to la Vallée Mulâtre affording it some help in keeping direction. The 1/King's Shropshire L.I. led at first, the 1/Buffs and 2/York & Lancaster later passing through it, and about 7.30 a.m. these two battalions reached the intermediate objective. At 10.30 a.m. an enemy counter-attack from la Vallée Mulâtre[2], which was strongly held, appeared imminent, but here also the advance of the 1st Division had an immediate effect and prevented the counter-attack from developing.

The 1st and 2nd Brigades (Br.-Generals L. L. Wheatley and G. C. Kelly) of the 1st Division had an arduous march in the dark along greatly congested roads, but were up to time at their assembly places about Becquigny and west of Vaux Andigny. Each had one squadron of the Royal Scots Greys, a section of an engineer field company and a machine-gun company attached to it—but no opportunity to use

[1] The line in this neighbourhood on Sketch 25 is taken from F.O.A. vii (ii).
[2] By the newly arrived *221st Division* ("Res. Regt. No. 17").

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cavalry occurred. The 2nd Brigade had also at its disposal four tanks of the 6th Battalion and 12 whippets, these latter to be used for exploitation. At zero hour, under some shelling, the two brigades marched forward to the Regnicourt–Vaux Andigny road, which they left at 7.30 a.m., the right moving against Belle Vue ridge and the left against la Vallée Mulâtre. Well guided in the mist the 1/L. North Lancashire and the right half of the 1/Cameron Highlanders captured the shrine at Belle Vue, taking 170 Germans and ten machine guns, cleared the ridge and captured Andigny les Fermes, with 70 prisoners and two field guns, at a cost of only fifteen casualties. The left half of the Camerons, after mopping up a number of machine-gun posts, with the assistance of three of the tanks, reached Angin Farm ridge, the machine-gun nest there being put out of action by one of the tanks, another of which was then knocked out. Capturing two field guns on the way, the Camerons finally reached the intermediate objective west of la Vallée Mulâtre, on which line the 1/L. North Lancashire was already established. There both battalions were under machine-gun fire from Blancs Fosses, the enemy line of resistance being, as on the Aisne in September, 1914, a short distance back from the crest of the slope of the river valley.

The 2nd Brigade, with the 1/Northamptonshire and 2/K.R.R.C. leading, was equally well guided, and, except for shelling and the fire from machine-gun posts overlooked in the advance of the 6th Division, reached the intermediate objective without special incident.

The further advance of the four battalions of the 1st Division from the intermediate to the first objective between Andigny les Fermes and la Demilieue was fully successful on the right, but not quite so on the left. They encountered stiff opposition and thus the barrage fired by the eight brigades which had supported the 6th Division was soon lost. To deal with the machine guns on the right near Blancs Fosses a section of the 113th Battery was brought up to a position near Angin, and then Mal Assise Farm spur, which overlooks the subsidiary valley in which lies la Vallée Mulâtre, was taken by flank and frontal attack, 42 prisoners and ten machine guns being captured by the Camerons without a casualty. This incident led to about a hundred other Germans, attacked also in front at the time by the 1/Northamptonshire and four tanks (one of which was lost),

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fleeing from la Vallée Mulâtre into Andigny Forest, abandoning three field guns. A line of posts was then established two hundred yards west of the forest, but a counter-attack drove the Northamptonshire out of the north-eastern part of la Vallée Mulâtre. Farther north many machine guns concealed behind hedges gave the 2/K.R.R.C. much trouble; even a flanking attack, in which an American platoon took part, could account for only seven machine guns out of many dozens, and four whippets sent up to help were all knocked out. Thus by about midday the line of the 1st and 2nd Brigades ran from Andigny les Fermes through the centre of la Vallée Mulâtre and then turned back along the Wassigny–le Cateau railway, where it was in touch with the American 30th Division.

The barrage was now far ahead, and the field batteries would soon be on the move forward. There was small chance, without artillery support, of overcoming the resistance offered from good cover in this enclosed country; so Major-General Strickland ordered a fresh barrage and an attack at 5.15 p.m. against the main German position. This interval proved insufficient for the batteries and the barrage was ragged. The North Lancashire and Cameron Highlanders of the 1st Brigade reached the edge of Andigny Forest south-east of la Vallée Mulâtre, but counter-preparation by gas shell drove the battalions back almost to the line of departure. In the 2nd Brigade the reserve battalion, the 2/R. Sussex, took the place of the 2/K.R.R.C.; the 1/Northamptonshire again captured the whole of la Vallée Mulâtre and established a line east of it; the Sussex pushed half a mile ahead of the troops on either flank, beyond la Demilieue and almost to Belle Vue, capturing a field gun and many machine guns. Then, receiving fire from three directions, the battalions were withdrawn towards the railway, and formed a defensive right flank to connect with the Northamptonshire. Thus the 1st Division was only just short of the first objective, and well established on the plateau above the Selle valley.

The river Selle in the sector of the American II Corps (Major-General G. W. Read), about a thousand yards away down a gentle slope, is a small stream, not a serious military obstacle, and it is successfully negotiated in spite of the fog. It possessed in peace time two bridges on main

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roads at Molain and St. Souplet respectively, the latter 20-foot span, and three minor bridges at Martin Rivière, and all had been " destroyed " by the Germans. But the abutments of three and the haunches of another were intact ; so, besides material for footbridges, planks to span the gaps in the permanent bridges were carried forward immediately behind the advance. The Selle, however, did prove an obstacle to tanks ; although only one was actually left in the stream. Owing to the difficulties of crossing, the 301st Tank Battalion was delayed, could not keep up in the fog, and then lost nine out of the remaining nineteen by fire, so that the assistance it rendered was, in the words of the American official monograph, " negligible ".

The 30th and 27th Divisions (Major-Generals E. M. Lewis and F. O'Ryan) were both employed, the former with both regiments of the 59th Brigade (Br.-General L. D. Tyson) in the line and the 60th (Br.-General S. L. Faison) in support, and the 27th Division with one regiment each of the 53rd and 54th Brigades (Br.-Generals A. H. Blanding and P. E. Pierce) in the line, with the other regiment of each brigade in support. In addition to the barrage contributed by ten Australian field artillery brigades, for 21 minutes after zero hour two machine-gun battalions fired on the villages of Molain and Martin Rivière (which are both on the Selle) and on the road connecting them.

On a one-battalion frontage the 117th Regiment of the 59th Brigade met with no serious resistance until close to Molain, when heavy fire from the right as well as the front struck it. It was reinforced by both other battalions; but in the mist the mopping up of Molain took time, and it was not until after 10.30 a.m. that the three battalions in line crossed the Selle, and, although they had lost the barrage, pushed on. Reaching the road which runs northward from la Vallée Mulâtre to l'Arbre de Guise, near the crest of the slope, the 117th was met by concentrated artillery and machine-gun fire from the German main position in front and machine-gun fire from the left, where the 118th was not yet up, and, being unable to advance, the 117th dug in.

The 118th had been held up by enfilade fire from Molain until the 117th had cleared the village, and then had some trouble in dealing with Martin Rivière; so that it was not until 3.30 p.m. that the regiment came abreast of the

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117th, after securing the hamlet of l'Arbre de Guise, which, with l'Arbre Guernon, lies at the top of the rise from the river. There the advance for the day ended.

In the 27th Division, the 105th and 108th Regiments led the advance of the 53rd and 54th Brigades, each with one battalion in front line. That of the 105th was at once caught by a counter-attack, and as reorganization in the heavy mist would take time the support battalion was passed through at once, and, carrying some of the first with it, crossed the Selle. By 8.45 a.m. the leaders had reached l'Arbre Guernon, although it was nearly two hours before the hamlet was completely mopped up. Fire from the south and east now checked progress, and at 1.30 p.m. the line was only just east of l'Arbre Guernon. By 3.30 p.m., when the 118th Regiment (59th Brigade) came up on the right, nearly the whole of the 105th as well as some parts of the 196th, the supporting regiment, were in the line; but they were unable to progress. The brigade commander, therefore, ordered consolidation.

In the 54th Brigade sector the 108th Regiment soon cleared the eastern part of St. Souplet, crossed the stream and the railway, and by 6.45 a.m. had taken Baudival Farm, over a mile from the starting line. There a group of buildings six hundred yards north-east of the farm, converted into a strongpoint, hampered advance, and towards 8 a.m. a counter-attack from the strongpoint drove in the left flank. It was not until the late afternoon that the buildings were demolished by gun-fire; but the advance went on all the same, and just before midday the leading troops were about a quarter of a mile from the l'Arbre Guernon–le Cateau road, and shortly afterwards a further advance was made almost up to it. Again the left was driven back by a counter-attack, which began about 2.15 p.m. and also struck the right of the neighbouring British 50th Division;[1] but the ground lost was regained and at 4.15 p.m. the 54th Brigade, like the others, was ordered to consolidate. The American II Corps had reached the top of the spur overlooking the Selle valley and, except on the extreme left, was between the intermediate and first objective.

The 105th Engineer Regiment (30th Division) had the Molain bridge open for motor traffic by 4.30 p.m., and the

[1] It was made by two regiments of the *243rd* Division and one of the *204th* " too weak to effect anything ".

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102nd (27th Division), in addition to throwing five foot-bridges under fire close behind the advancing infantry, constructed a bridge at St. Souplet, which was ready by 10.30 a.m.

The XIII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir T. Morland) attacked with the 50th and 66th Divisions (Major-Generals H. C. Jackson and H. K. Bethell). It has already been mentioned that the only sector where it was deemed possible for the 50th Division to cross the Selle was the one about five hundred yards wide, immediately north of St. Souplet. This was part of the line taken over for the purpose from the American II Corps during the night of the 14th/15th October. Reconnaissances of the river by the C.R.E., Lieut.-Colonel P. de H. Hall, and the officers of the 7th, 446th and 447th Field Companies R.E., revealed that the enemy was holding the line of the railway, about three hundred yards from it, in considerable strength, with a large number of machine-gun posts between the river and the railway. The width of the river near St. Souplet varied from 12 to 20 feet, and the depth from 4 to 5 feet, and near St. Benin the width was 20 to 26 feet and the depth 3 to 4. At the former place the width allowed the use of portable spans of the duckboard (ladder) type, quickly thrown, while at the latter floating supports would be necessary, and bridges would take about 15 minutes to construct. It was therefore decided that twelve duckboard bridges and four floating bridges should be thrown between St. Souplet and St. Benin,[1] and that the 151st Brigade (Br.-General R. E. Sugden) should cross first and capture the intermediate objective on the narrow 500-yard front, and then deploy to the left, when the 149th Brigade (Br.-General P. M. Robinson), following, should go on to the first objective, and the 150th (Br.-General G. Rollo), from divisional reserve, to the second.

The duckboard bridges were taken by field company transport to the valley behind the ridge between St. Souplet and St. Benin, about thirteen hundred yards from the Selle, by 4 p.m. on the 16th, and carried forward by the pioneers (5/Royal Irish) to within about five hundred yards of the

[1] The duckboard bridges were made from timber in a German dump near Honnechy. Originally 12 feet long, they were lengthened to 18 feet to make them serviceable for any greater width which might be encountered. The other bridges, with floats, were drawn from the Army Park.

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stream by 8.30 p.m. The bridges with floats were carted to within five hundred yards, the covering ridge being much narrower near St. Benin, and then carried forward after dark, and by 12.30 a.m. (17th) were concealed about fifty yards from the site.

At 4.50 a.m. (17th) the enemy began a bombardment of the roads and tracks in the forward area, which necessitated the wearing of gas masks until zero hour (5.20 a.m.). All the engineer parties had been formed up at 1 a.m., and they gradually worked forward, cutting gaps in the hedges as they went, closely followed by the infantry. Five duckboard bridges were placed across the river at five minutes before zero hour. Then the barrage, fired by three brigades of field artillery[1] and ninety-six machine guns, opened. The gun barrage came down about a hundred yards east of the river and rested there for three minutes, and then lifted on to the railway. Immediately the southern bridging parties[2] advanced and threw the rest of their duckboard bridges; those near St. Benin carried their floaters the last fifty yards and placed them in position, the whole process taking no more than ten minutes; the infantry actually began crossing in seven minutes, whilst the sappers were making fast the gangways. The bridges made, the group of engineers and pioneers retired, leaving only maintenance parties to repair damage. All this, thanks to the thick mist, was done under the noses of the enemy without a casualty.

At zero hour the 151st Brigade was assembled in depth just north of St. Souplet: from front to rear, the 4/K.R.R.C., the 1/K.O.Y.L.I. and the 6/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers, on a two-company frontage. The crossing itself by the three groups of duckboard bridges was carried out without much opposition, and the rear battalions duly formed on the left of the leading one. Then the enemy machine-gun fire became severe. The Rifles and K.O.Y.L.I. had to fight their way forward, making for their sectors of the intermediate line, through thirty yards' depth of wire; yet by 45 minutes after Zero they had reached the railway. In the next two and a half hours, having to cross the spur on the western side of the l'Arbre Guernon–St. Benin valley, they

[1] Those of the 25th Division and an Army brigade, under Br.-General K. J. Kincaid-Smith.

[2] One R.E. officer, one pioneer officer, 17 sappers and 50 pioneers (for carrying) to each group of 4 bridges. At St. Benin there was a similar group to each pair of bridges.

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had gained only a further three hundred yards, except on the left, where the left wing of the K.O.Y.L.I. reached some orchards about six hundred yards farther, and only four hundred from the intermediate objective. The Inniskilling, the last to deploy east of the river, were ready to advance at 5.50 a.m., and did so six minutes later in accordance with the barrage programme, in face of a now aroused opposition. They reached the railway, where the Germans fought so desperately that at 7.30 a.m. a message was sent back to the 13/Black Watch (149th Brigade) asking for a company to reinforce.

Eleven tanks (of which three soon broke down and two were bogged) of the 1st Tank Battalion, in three groups, after crossing the Selle at St. Souplet on specially made wooden cribs, had followed the three battalions of the 151st Brigade ; but as they were unable to see them on account of the mist and the infantry was unable either to see the tanks or even to hear them on account of the noise of battle, co-operation was lacking. The right section of three tanks reached the intermediate objective and helped to clear le Quennelet Farm and then manoeuvred between the intermediate and first objectives, mopping up machine-gun posts. The centre sector of two tanks also reached the intermediate objective ; one received six direct hits and caught fire ; the other engaged machine guns near the Brickworks, but, finding that the infantry had not at the time got so far, returned. The left section, reduced to one tank by accidents of the road, shot down the crew of a field gun and put some machine guns near the Brickworks out of action, and then returned. Tank assistance thus terminated early in the day.

The 149th Brigade, with the 3/Royal Fusiliers, 2/R. Dublin Fusiliers and 13/Black Watch in the line, had been timed to leave the intermediate objective at 7.35 a.m. The two flank battalions followed closely behind the 151st Brigade, using its bridges, and the Black Watch then turned northwards and went to the assistance of the Inniskilling ; the Royal Fusiliers manned the railway in rear of the K.R.R.C. The centre battalion, the Dublin Fusiliers, had to wait until the Black Watch cleared its front, and did not begin to cross by the four floating bridges south of St. Benin until 6.30 a.m.

The thickness of the fog, though it screened the passage of the river, obscured not only the general situation, but also

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rendered even the position of companies difficult to fix and report. It seems, however, that before 10 a.m. the 4/K.R.R.C. was digging in on the intermediate objective, where the 3/Royal Fusiliers soon found it; but there was a gap on the right because the American 27th Division was not yet up. The right wing of the 1/K.O.Y.L.I. arrived shortly afterwards, but the left wing was still in the orchards. The Inniskilling aided by the Black Watch, working northwards, after severe fighting, had reached the railway station in the southern part of le Cateau, and it became evident that "The Railway Triangle", the objective, was strongly held; they could not, therefore, give much assistance to the 66th Division, whose principal attack as left prong of the "pincers" was to be south-eastwards from the north of le Cateau. The 2/R. Dublin Fusiliers, delayed at the bridges, after suffering severely from machine-gun fire from the Fassiaux bridge–le Cateau road on the left, did not reach the railway embankment until about 8.30 a.m. and then found the intermediate objective, a few hundred yards farther on, was still held by the Germans. This it was ordered by the 149th Brigade headquarters at 10.25 a.m. to make good.

Before there was time to carry out this order, about 11 a.m., but just before this a company of the 3/Royal Fusiliers had, with the help of three tanks, pushed forward to le Quennelet Farm,[1] the mist having cleared, the enemy counter-attacked heavily from the higher ground north-east of the orchards;[2] three companies of the K.O.Y.L.I. were driven back to the railway, where the Dublin Fusiliers still remained, but the fourth held on in the orchards. The left of the 4/K.R.R.C. was now exposed, so the battalion and the 3/Royal Fusiliers mixed with it were withdrawn about three hundred yards.

When the 149th Brigade was drawn into the fighting, the 150th Brigade, in reserve west of the Selle, had been ordered by divisional headquarters to cross the stream and move to the railway embankment north of St. Souplet. This was in readiness for an advance at midday through the 151st and 149th to the first objective; but at 11.15 a.m. the move was cancelled and preparations were ordered for an attack against the le Cateau station buildings and the Railway

[1] Tank accounts say "three"; infantry accounts, "one".

[2] The counter-attack was made by two battalions of the *163rd Regiment* of the *17th Reserve Division*, with much trench-mortar fire: "There was no result on account of the strong resistance". ("Regt. No. 163").

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Triangle, after a bombardment of these localities from 3 to 3.30 p.m. by the heavy artillery. The Inniskilling and the Black Watch were still fighting round the station, and by about 2 p.m. had made some progress, having captured the mound north and east of it and a petroleum refinery within the defended perimeter. The organized attack arranged for 3.30 p.m. was upset by a second German counter-attack, about 2.15 p.m., from the high ground near the orchards,[1] part of the movement against the junction of the American II Corps and the XIII Corps, already mentioned. The 4/K.R.R.C., now very weak owing to casualties, fell back a short way, and soon after 3 p.m. the 7/Wiltshire (150th Brigade) was ordered to the spur north-west of Baudival Farm to support it.

The battalions of the three brigades of the 50th Division were by this time mixed up in the fighting line, and at 4.35 p.m. Major-General Jackson divided the front into three sectors under the brigade commanders. To Br.-General Rollo he gave the right sector, with the 3/Royal Fusiliers (149th), 7th Wiltshire (150th) and 4/K.R.R.C. (151st); to Br.-General Sugden, in the centre, as far as the Brickworks, with the 1/K.O.Y.L.I. (151st), 2/R. Munster (150th) and the 2/R. Dublin Fusiliers (149th); and to Br.-General Robinson, with the 2/Northumberland Fusiliers (150th), the 6/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers (151st) and 13/Black Watch (149th), the left sector, to the corps boundary. The brigadiers were at the same time ordered to establish their commands on the intermediate objective, and this was done in each case without much opposition, as the Germans were, by their own accounts, thoroughly exhausted. Divisional orders were given for the 2/Northumberland Fusiliers to attack the Railway Triangle which had hindered progress all day, but they reached the battalion very late, and the operation did not take place.

The 66th Division, on the left of the 50th, had a shorter distance to go, so its infantry was not to advance until 8.5 a.m.[2] but an attack was to be simulated at 5.20 a.m. The real attack was to be made by the South African Brigade

[1] Made by portions of the *204th* and *243rd Divisions*. Regimental accounts give the time as 2.15 p.m.

[2] The barrage table makes it 7.47 a.m., but the war diary of the S. African Brigade states that the infantry advanced at 8.5 a.m., " under cover of " artillery and machine-gun barrage " ; so it would appear that the starting hour was changed.

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(Br.-General W. E. C. Tanner) from the north of le Cateau south-eastwards to the line Railway Triangle (exclusive)—Baillon Farm, with a defensive flank first from the farm to the Selle, but later to be extended along the Richemont stream. The brigades were told that the Third Army on the left was not going to attack, but that its right division, the 38th, would co-operate with artillery and machine-gun fire, and by a " Chinese barrage ", that is a barrage not accompanied by an infantry attack. The town of le Cateau—between the convergent advances of the 50th Division and the South African Brigade—would be mopped up by two battalions of the 198th Brigade (Br.-General A. J. Hunter), its third battalion and the 199th Brigade (Br.-General G. C. Williams) remaining in divisional reserve.

At dusk on the 16th the 198th Brigade relieved the South African Brigade, which was in the line, and the latter then concentrated in the ravines behind a spur about three-quarters of a mile north-west of le Cateau. At 8 p.m. (16th), after enemy outposts had been cleared away by the 1st S. African Battalion, and it had established its own east of the river and cut gaps in the wire, the 4th and 2nd Battalions moved forward to a position just west of the Selle. Parties from the 430th, 431st and 432nd Field Companies R.E. and the pioneers (9/Gloucestershire), under the C.R.E. (Lieut.-Colonel O. S. Davies), then set to work to construct eight footbridges over the 20-foot stream, the surface of the water being 5 feet below the steep banks. Four of these bridges were in the northern outskirts of le Cateau, and four opposite Baillon Farm. They were completed by 2 a.m. (17th) and the infantry then began to cross to the assembly position on the eastern bank, the valley of the Richemont being at the same time deluged with gas shell as flank protection. The operation of crossing in the mist over narrow bridges and through equally narrow gaps was necessarily slow and not completed until 4.50 a.m. The South Africans lay down as they arrived, within fifty yards of the enemy, shielded only by the mist, to remain inactive for a long ordeal of three hours; but, being so near to the enemy most of his counter-barrage passed over their heads.

From 5.20 to 5.38 a.m. a " Chinese barrage " was fired by the four brigades of field artillery, under Br.-General T. O. Seagram, supporting the attack, and by the batteries of the 38th Division, and then, until 7.32 a.m. the guns searched

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the ground within the barrage limit, coming back again at that hour to the starting line to recommence first the standing and then the creeping barrage.

When at 8.5 a.m., the mist still prevailing, the 4th and 2nd South African Battalions began to advance, they found that thick belts of wire, not dealt with by the 1st Battalion, nor touched by the barrage owing to their close proximity to the assembly position, had to be cut by hand, or passed by the zig-zag sortie passages and the trench-ways dug under the wire used by the enemy, and when these belts had been negotiated, a sunken road guarded by a brushwood palisade and more wire barred the advance of the right. But, in spite of these obstacles and of machine-gun fire, the 4th and 2nd pressed on. The former reached the railway cutting by 8.30 a.m., only to find it a most formidable position, 50 feet deep at its maximum, the tops of both banks wired and the enemy holding the eastern side with machine guns, and consequently it was an hour before this line was occupied throughout. The 2nd Battalion reached the intermediate objective, just beyond the railway in its sector, by 9.15 a.m. The battalions were now raked by severe enfilade fire from both flanks, and also subject to fire from the houses of Le Cateau ; they nevertheless held on, and no counter-attack developed. It was not, however, until evening and after hand-to-hand fighting that the defensive flank could be formed along the Richemont stream.

The mopping up of Le Cateau with its maze of streets had proved no easy task. First, two companies of the 6/R. Dublin Fusiliers were employed, then the whole battalion and some of the 5/R. Inniskilling, and at 10.40 a.m. the 6/Lancashire Fusiliers from reserve was sent to enter the town from the south. At 2 p.m., this last battalion was withdrawn when it was learned that the Railway Triangle had not been captured. By 6 p.m., however, the whole of Le Cateau was in the hands of the 198th Brigade, with the exception of the small faubourg of the eastern outskirts.

The attack of the three corps of the Fourth Army had forced the passage of the Selle in the face of strong German opposition, had broken well into the Hermann Stellung I, and enabled a line to be established on the plateau, or rather broad ridge, which separates the valleys of the Selle and the Sambre. The left of the French First Army[1] also made a

[1] See Sketch 26.

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small advance; but it was not until ten days later that this Army came up abreast of the British.

On the 17th[1] G.H.Q. issued a formal operation order in continuation of that of the 11th October.[2] The Fourth, Third and First Armies, with the French First Army co-operating, were, "to be ready to launch a general attack "from positions on the east bank of the Selle on or about "the 21st instant", with the object of securing the line Sambre canal—the western edge of the Forest of Mormal and northward to the Schelde. The Army commanders were to report as soon as possible when they would be in a position to move.

On the same day, Sir Douglas Haig received a letter from Maréchal Foch pointing out the supreme importance of the operations in progress and of the necessity of secrecy. The President of the Council, he said, had decided to suspend for the time being the visits of the Missions and of individual officers of neutral countries to the front and to the lines of communication: he asked the British to conform and at the same time to sanction the visits of neutral journalists only with every possible precaution to prevent news of impending operations from being obtained. Sir Douglas Haig expressed complete agreement with these measures and arranged to have them put into execution. It was of course vitally important that the sequence of the offensives should not become known to the enemy.

NOTE I

THE FRENCH AND AMERICANS ON 17TH OCTOBER

(Sketches 21, 26)

On the 17th October only the three left corps of the French First Army attacked after a bombardment "of not less than 24 hours". The progress made, as will be seen from Sketch 26, was exceedingly small. The official map (F.O.A. vii (ii), Carte 10), from which the sketch was photographed shows that the Oise

[1] See Frontispiece.
[2] See pp. 244–5.

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was crossed on a wide front. The text (pp. 178–9) does not bear this out; it claims only that Mont d'Origny was captured, but the eastern part lost, and that south of that locality "the 36th "Division [XXXI Corps] succeeded in pushing elements on to "the left bank of the Oise". Advance was prevented by "intact "wire", "extremely dense fire of machine guns and artillery", "counter-attacks and massed artillery fire".

The central French Armies[1] did not attack. The American–French forces on the Argonne front "made partial attacks, all "of which were repulsed, but otherwise kept fairly quiet". (Gallwitz, p. 422.)[2]

NOTE II

The Germans on 17th October

A council of war was held between the German War Cabinet and O.H.L. on the 17th to settle what answer should be sent to President Wilson. It had previously been decided by the Chancellor, on the suggestion of the Vice-Chancellor, after he had ascertained that the Kaiser would raise no objection, that "if "Ludendorff declares that the front will no longer hold, other "generals must be consulted; in this case, the Cabinet will take "the responsibility for his dismissal".

Hindenburg was not present at the council. No precise answer could be extracted from Ludendorff (for a full account of the council see Max ii, pp. 99–142, Niemann, p. 154, and Ludendorff, p. 784). He said, "war is not like an arithmetical sum. In "war there are many probabilities and improbabilities—in war "you need 'Soldier's Luck'; perhaps Germany will still enjoy "'Soldier's Luck' once more". He threatened to resign if other generals were consulted and prevaricated on the subject of looting and senseless damage done by the German troops. According to the protocol (*Urkunden*, p. 128) Ludendorff regarded the future more hopefully than before, and believed, on the information given to him by the Minister of War about reinforcements, that the front could hold out to the spring. But he made the point that he must have reinforcements: he had been receiving 70,000

[1] See Sketch 21.

[2] Colonel G. L. McEntee, in "Military History of the World War" (p. 540) and some other American authors state that 12 German divisions were taken from the quiescent centre of the French front and 5 from the even quieter Vosges front to reinforce the Argonne sector. He does not give the identifying numbers and class of these divisions, so at present it is impossible to verify the statement. General von Gallwitz does not mention reinforcements.

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men a month too few. " If this deficit is made good and if the " offensive power of the enemy weakens [he knew that, with " American aid, it was increasing and likely to go on increasing], " we shall then no longer be obliged to accept any terms which " may be offered ". He confessed in fact the desperate plight of the German Armies—which the events of the 17th were to aggravate.

Prince Max of Baden in his diary summed up that the military statement, " stripped of its embroideries ", meant " a reversal of " fortune in our favour is inconceivable. The U-boat warfare " cannot bring it about. We have lost the initiative . . . . " Conditions will grow less favourable . . . . The enemy's " superiority increases daily ".

No definite conclusion was reached as to the reply to be sent to President Wilson, and Ludendorff returned to O.H.L. at Spa.

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roads at Molain and St. Souplet respectively, the latter 20-foot span, and three minor bridges at Martin Rivière, and all had been " destroyed " by the Germans. But the abutments of three and the haunches of another were intact ; so, besides material for footbridges, planks to span the gaps in the permanent bridges were carried forward immediately behind the advance. The Selle, however, did prove an obstacle to tanks ; although only one was actually left in the stream. Owing to the difficulties of crossing, the 301st Tank Battalion was delayed, could not keep up in the fog, and then lost nine out of the remaining nineteen by fire, so that the assistance it rendered was, in the words of the American official monograph, " negligible ".

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117th, after securing the hamlet of l'Arbre de Guise, which, with l'Arbre Guernon, lies at the top of the rise from the river. There the advance for the day ended.

In the 27th Division, the 105th and 108th Regiments led the advance of the 53rd and 54th Brigades, each with one battalion in front line. That of the 105th was at once caught by a counter-attack, and as reorganization in the heavy mist would take time the support battalion was passed through at once, and, carrying some of the first with it, crossed the Selle. By 8.45 a.m. the leaders had reached l'Arbre Guernon, although it was nearly two hours before the hamlet was completely mopped up. Fire from the south and east now checked progress, and at 1.30 p.m. the line was only just east of l'Arbre Guernon. By 3.30 p.m., when the 118th Regiment (59th Brigade) came up on the right, nearly the whole of the 105th as well as some parts of the 196th, the supporting regiment, were in the line; but they were unable to progress. The brigade commander, therefore, ordered consolidation.

In the 54th Brigade sector the 108th Regiment soon cleared the eastern part of St. Souplet, crossed the stream and the railway, and by 6.45 a.m. had taken Baudival Farm, over a mile from the starting line. There a group of buildings six hundred yards north-east of the farm, converted into a strongpoint, hampered advance, and towards 8 a.m. a counter-attack from the strongpoint drove in the left flank. It was not until the late afternoon that the buildings were demolished by gun-fire; but the advance went on all the same, and just before midday the leading troops were about a quarter of a mile from the l'Arbre Guernon–le Cateau road, and shortly afterwards a further advance was made almost up to it. Again the left was driven back by a counter-attack, which began about 2.15 p.m. and also struck the right of the neighbouring British 50th Division;[1] but the ground lost was regained and at 4.15 p.m. the 54th Brigade, like the others, was ordered to consolidate. The American II Corps had reached the top of the spur overlooking the Selle valley and, except on the extreme left, was between the intermediate and first objective.

The 105th Engineer Regiment (30th Division) had the Molain bridge open for motor traffic by 4.30 p.m., and the

[1] It was made by two regiments of the *243rd* Division and one of the *204th* " too weak to effect anything ".

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102nd (27th Division), in addition to throwing five foot-bridges under fire close behind the advancing infantry, constructed a bridge at St. Souplet, which was ready by 10.30 a.m.

The XIII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir T. Morland) attacked with the 50th and 66th Divisions (Major-Generals H. C. Jackson and H. K. Bethell). It has already been mentioned that the only sector where it was deemed possible for the 50th Division to cross the Selle was the one about five hundred yards wide, immediately north of St. Souplet. This was part of the line taken over for the purpose from the American II Corps during the night of the 14th/15th October. Reconnaissances of the river by the C.R.E., Lieut.-Colonel P. de H. Hall, and the officers of the 7th, 446th and 447th Field Companies R.E., revealed that the enemy was holding the line of the railway, about three hundred yards from it, in considerable strength, with a large number of machine-gun posts between the river and the railway. The width of the river near St. Souplet varied from 12 to 20 feet, and the depth from 4 to 5 feet, and near St. Benin the width was 20 to 26 feet and the depth 3 to 4. At the former place the width allowed the use of portable spans of the duckboard (ladder) type, quickly thrown, while at the latter floating supports would be necessary, and bridges would take about 15 minutes to construct. It was therefore decided that twelve duckboard bridges and four floating bridges should be thrown between St. Souplet and St. Benin,[1] and that the 151st Brigade (Br.-General R. E. Sugden) should cross first and capture the intermediate objective on the narrow 500-yard front, and then deploy to the left, when the 149th Brigade (Br.-General P. M. Robinson), following, should go on to the first objective, and the 150th (Br.-General G. Rollo), from divisional reserve, to the second.

The duckboard bridges were taken by field company transport to the valley behind the ridge between St. Souplet and St. Benin, about thirteen hundred yards from the Selle, by 4 p.m. on the 16th, and carried forward by the pioneers (5/Royal Irish) to within about five hundred yards of the

[1] The duckboard bridges were made from timber in a German dump near Honnechy. Originally 12 feet long, they were lengthened to 18 feet to make them serviceable for any greater width which might be encountered. The other bridges, with floats, were drawn from the Army Park.

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stream by 8.30 p.m. The bridges with floats were carted to within five hundred yards, the covering ridge being much narrower near St. Benin, and then carried forward after dark, and by 12.30 a.m. (17th) were concealed about fifty yards from the site.

At 4.50 a.m. (17th) the enemy began a bombardment of the roads and tracks in the forward area, which necessitated the wearing of gas masks until zero hour (5.20 a.m.). All the engineer parties had been formed up at 1 a.m., and they gradually worked forward, cutting gaps in the hedges as they went, closely followed by the infantry. Five duckboard bridges were placed across the river at five minutes before zero hour. Then the barrage, fired by three brigades of field artillery[1] and ninety-six machine guns, opened. The gun barrage came down about a hundred yards east of the river and rested there for three minutes, and then lifted on to the railway. Immediately the southern bridging parties[2] advanced and threw the rest of their duckboard bridges; those near St. Benin carried their floaters the last fifty yards and placed them in position, the whole process taking no more than ten minutes; the infantry actually began crossing in seven minutes, whilst the sappers were making fast the gangways. The bridges made, the group of engineers and pioneers retired, leaving only maintenance parties to repair damage. All this, thanks to the thick mist, was done under the noses of the enemy without a casualty.

At zero hour the 151st Brigade was assembled in depth just north of St. Souplet: from front to rear, the 4/K.R.R.C., the 1/K.O.Y.L.I. and the 6/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers, on a two-company frontage. The crossing itself by the three groups of duckboard bridges was carried out without much opposition, and the rear battalions duly formed on the left of the leading one. Then the enemy machine-gun fire became severe. The Rifles and K.O.Y.L.I. had to fight their way forward, making for their sectors of the intermediate line, through thirty yards' depth of wire; yet by 45 minutes after Zero they had reached the railway. In the next two and a half hours, having to cross the spur on the western side of the l'Arbre Guernon–St. Benin valley, they

[1] Those of the 25th Division and an Army brigade, under Br.-General K. J. Kincaid-Smith.

[2] One R.E. officer, one pioneer officer, 17 sappers and 50 pioneers (for carrying) to each group of 4 bridges. At St. Benin there was a similar group to each pair of bridges.

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CHAPTER XXI

Battle of the Selle (*continued*)

Second and Third Days: 18th/19th October

The Fourth Army

(Sketches 25, 26)

Steady progress was made by the Fourth Army[1] on the 18th and 19th; but the opportunity to exploit the success of forcing the Selle was lost, first, from the lack of an arm of pursuit—for cavalry was no longer able to fulfil this function, and the tank, its successor, was too weak both in speed and structure, not to say in numbers, for the task. Secondly, there was the absence of fresh troops with which to hustle the Germans; and, thirdly, there was the too close adherence to a routine procedure, in this case dawn attacks under a creeping barrage.

The battle on this front was brought to a close on the evening of the 19th, when the right and centre of the Fourth Army were getting close to the Sambre canal. With a view to resuming the attack as part of the general offensive of the Fourth, Third and First Armies—forecast at the end of the last chapter—on the 21st October, the Third Army remained halted during the 18th and 19th, but the First Army continued to push on in order to get abreast of the Third.[2]

By Fourth Army orders, issued on the night of the 17th, the objective for the 18th was slightly altered; as far north as the Mazinghien–Catillon road it was to coincide roughly with the original second objective; it then ran west of that objective past the western edge of Bazuel to the point east of le Cateau where the first and second objectives intersected. The left wing, that is the left half of the American II Corps and the XIII Corps, was to continue the advance at the almost standard hour of 5.30 a.m.; but as the right wing of the 1st Division (which had made its final attack at

[1] See Sketch 25.
[2] See Chapter XXII.

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5.15 p.m.) was engaged until a late hour on the 17th, it was left to the IX Corps to decide at what hour it would attack in co-operation with the right half of the American II Corps, and the 1st Division fixed 11.30 a.m. as the earliest time possible. General Read was naturally anxious that his corps should fight as a whole, and it was eventually agreed that the American II Corps should attack at 5.30 a.m., at the same time as the XIII Corps, using one regiment to keep connection with the IX Corps.

The morning was foggy, but became clear earlier than on the previous day. The enemy was evidently expecting a before-dawn advance and a heavy counter-barrage at once came down on the attackers. In the American II Corps the 119th Regiment of the 60th Brigade stood fast to wait for the IX Corps on its right. The 120th Regiment advanced about half a mile, meeting with little opposition, and then halted to wait for the 119th ; but when the fog lifted about 10 a.m. it was subjected to such heavy shelling that it was forced to withdraw to the jumping-off position. At 11.30 a.m., when the 119th Regiment moved to the attack it also was compelled to fall back by fire from Ribeauville and Mazinghien, and it was not until 5 p.m., when the advance of the IX Corps had made itself felt, and Ribeauville had been occupied by troops of that corps, that the 119th was able to resume its advance and pass to the east of that village. Towards 6 p.m. the 120th also advanced and reached the outskirts of Mazinghien. The advance of the brigades of the 27th Division also was slow in this enclosed country. In the first two hours in the fog the regiments of the 53rd Brigade gained little more than half a mile. By 2.15 p.m. the line ran five hundred yards west of Jonc de Mer Farm, marking only another quarter of a mile of progress. The farm was finally captured with the help of the 107th Regiment of the 54th Brigade, and by 8 p.m. a line running through it had been organized.

The 107th Regiment of the 54th Brigade was brought to a standstill by fire from Jonc de Mer Farm and la Roue Farm about 8 a.m. ; but after both farms had been taken, the latter by the British 50th Division, the brigade line was stabilized on roughly the first objective. At 10.35 p.m., after the left of the 30th Division had come up, the 27th

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Division, determined to push on, made another advance, reached the Mazinghien–Bazuel road about 4 a.m. (19th), and then halted.

In the XIII Corps, the 50th and 66th Divisions continued the attack at 5.30 a.m. to capture the first and second objectives, with the 75th Brigade (25th Division) at the disposal of the 50th Division, but reserved for the capture of the second unless unavoidably involved earlier in the fighting. In view of the angle at which the objective lay to the jumping-off line, the barrage fired by four brigades for each division was in the 50th Division begun by the southernmost artillery brigade at 5.30 a.m., the remaining three coming in at intervals up to 5.53 a.m.

The 50th Division suffered considerably from the German counter-barrage. Its frontage, it will be recalled, had on account of the intermixture of units been divided into three sectors under the brigade commanders, Br.-Generals Rollo, Sugden and Robinson. The right group, which had the task of keeping touch with the Americans, was, like them, checked by fire from la Roue Farm. The centre group captured the Brickworks and reached the first objective with a haul of about three hundred prisoners; some of the 2/R. Munster Fusiliers pressed on and actually entered Bazuel, but had to be withdrawn, as they were ahead of the barrage put down for the oncoming 75th Brigade.[1]

The 75th Brigade (Br.-General C. W. Frizell), the 1/8th Worcestershire and 1/5th Gloucestershire leading, had in marching up suffered from the enemy's counter-barrage; but, leaving the railway at 7.15 a.m., it went through the right group, which was held up short of the first objective, and, in spite of machine-gun fire from right and left, and direct fire from field guns at short range until the detachments were driven away by Lewis gun fire and the pieces captured, pushed on to the crest of the ridge overlooking Bazuel. Between 2 and 3 p.m. it was east of the village, after capturing, amongst other trophies, a complete 4·2-inch howitzer battery. Towards 5 p.m. touch was established with the Americans by means of a defensive right flank.

The left group of the 50th Division first cleared a wood south of the Railway Triangle and rushed the la Vallée

[1] Sergeant H. A. Curtis, 2/R. Dublin Fusiliers (centre group) was awarded V.C. for great gallantry on this day.

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Mulâtre railway line, capturing 70 prisoners and 38 machine guns and trench mortars. It then pressed on and by 10.45 a.m. the Railway Triangle itself was in its hands with many more prisoners, thus completing the capture of all the objectives of the 50th Division.

The orders to the 66th Division to advance to the first objective with the 50th Division were cancelled at 12.5 a.m. on the 18th: the 198th and South African Brigades, in the line, were to consolidate and wait events. The early capture of the Railway Triangle by the 50th Division enabled the 198th Brigade to complete the mopping up of le Cateau in the forenoon and, in the afternoon, to move forward to the second objective, taking prisoners and machine guns en route. The South African Brigade established itself later on the second objective without opposition.

By fixing zero hour at 11.30 a.m. the 1st Division (Major-General E. P. Strickland) holding the front of the IX Corps, escaped the enemy counter-barrage and reaped the advantage of surprise. The attack was made by the 1/Black Watch, the reserve of the 1st Brigade, and by the 3rd Brigade (Br.-General E. G. St. Aubyn), hitherto in divisional reserve. The latter was brought up during the night of the 17th/18th to the valley west of la Vallée Mulâtre, its approach march in the morning being covered by smoke put down by the R.A.F. By 1st Brigade orders, the 1/Black Watch was to capture Wassigny, the 1/Cameron Highlanders forming a right defensive flank. This latter instruction proved unnecessary, as a battalion of the 137th Brigade (46th Division) was later detailed to keep connection with the French, and the left of the French First Army made such good progress that by midday three-quarters, and by the afternoon the whole, of Andigny Forest had been cleared of Germans.

The Black Watch carried all before them, and in three-quarters of an hour the leading two companies were in the outskirts of Wassigny. In the village itself very little resistance was forthcoming, as all the garrison were either asleep or eating. In one cellar, after a Lewis gunner had fired a drum of bullets into it, five officers and seventy-two other ranks surrendered; in another, five officers were discovered at luncheon. Consolidation was at once taken in hand and during the evening, with the aid of the two

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attached squadrons of the Royal Scots Greys, which did patrol work on the flank, touch was obtained with the French east of Andigny Forest, at Blocus d'en Bas.

On the left of the Black Watch, the 2/Welch and 1/South Wales Borderers, of the 3rd Brigade, met with only isolated resistance, the principal incident being that one machine-gun nest with a party of about thirty Germans in it had to be charged with the bayonet. By 2 p.m. both battalions were on their objective, the Wassigny–Ribeauville road, having captured about three hundred prisoners, fifty machine guns and five field guns. The third battalion, the 1/Gloucestershire, was employed to form a left defensive flank.

On the two flanks of the attack, therefore, the Fourth Army had complete success.

For the 19th General Rawlinson directed that the advance should be continued to the line of exploitation: that is a line from Blocus d'en Bas on the right north-eastwards to la Laurette, thence along the Sambre canal to Catillon, and thence north-west back to Bazuel. This line was not reached in the centre, as the advance was stopped by order from Fourth Army headquarters.

Again a heavy fog persisted in the morning hours. The 1st Division led the attack of the IX Corps, with the 1/Black Watch (1st Brigade) and the 2/Welch and 1/S. Wales Borderers (3rd Brigade) which had attacked on the previous day spread out on a nearly 3-mile frontage. Major-General Strickland had a brigade of the 6th Division at his call behind the old intermediate line, and the French XV Corps was to go forward with his troops at 5.30 a.m.—it did not, as it happened, advance until an hour later, and a patrol of the Royal Scots Greys had, in consequence, to be sent to look for it.

The objective of the 1st Division was the high ground overlooking the Sambre canal from near Oisy to la Laurette, with the left of the division pushed out north-westwards on Rejet de Beaulieu to assist in any attack the American II Corps might make on Mazinghien. Little opposition was encountered, as the enemy had withdrawn behind the canal during the night. With artillery and machine-guns

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ready in support, the advanced-guard company of the Black Watch occupied Arrouaise Farm, and then continued on to the objective, where liaison was established with the French north of Oisy, the eastern part of which the Germans were still holding. The 3rd Brigade encountered no opposition until Rejet de Beaulieu was approached, where an enemy machine-gun detachment with its guns was captured and the village occupied. By 11.30 a.m. the brigade was established on its objective, joining hands about 2 p.m. with the American 30th Division. In the afternoon the 1/Black Watch was relieved.[1]

The American divisions had also advanced at 5.30 a.m. The 60th Brigade of the 30th Division had by 10 a.m. taken Mazinghien and the leading lines soon after came under fire from la Haie Tonnoile Farm on a ridge athwart the Catillon road. By 2.30 p.m. the right was near Rejet de Beaulieu, and the line ran roughly N.N.W. to la Jonquière Farm already, about 8.45 a.m., occupied by the 27th Division. This latter formation, after a short advance, had also come under fire from la Haie Tonnoile Farm, and had dug in on the ridge overlooking the valley of the St. Maurice stream, and there waited for the 30th Division. Preparations were being made for the next advance, when orders were received from Fourth Army headquarters for the corps to stand fast and to dig in preparatory to relief by the IX Corps. Why this order was given will be explained later.

During the night of the 18th/19th on the front of the XIII Corps, on the left of the Americans, noise of movement and other indications seemed to point to a general retirement of the German line, and arrangements were made for an early start in the morning. The 75th Brigade (25th Division) led as advanced guard to the 50th Division. It was soon found that the enemy had not made off, and at 7.30 a.m., after the 75th Brigade had taken the rest of the original second objective and thus secured more than the objective of the day, operations ceased. The 25th Division was then instructed to take over from the 50th, which went back into reserve, and at 9 a.m. the command of the sector passed from Major-General Jackson to Major-General Charles.

[1] During the 18th and 19th it had lost 7 officers and 100 other ranks, and captured 20 officers and more than 300 other ranks, besides a field gun and twenty machine guns.

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Between the morning of the 17th and the evening of the 19th October the Fourth Army had captured 143 officers, 4,996 other ranks and 60 guns, mostly on the first day. The prisoners came from fourteen divisions, eleven of which were fully engaged against the Fourth Army. The resistance offered by the Germans was by no means as stout as hitherto, and it was judged unfortunate by G.H.Q., that the opportunity was not taken to push on and gain the Sambre line.

A new situation had, however, arisen as the result of the General Directive issued on the 19th by Maréchal Foch.[1] It was the last of the series, as it turned out, and outlined three operations to be undertaken by the Allied Armies.[2] In translation, it runs :

" In order to exploit the advantages already gained, the Allied Armies will take the following action :

" (1) The Group of Armies of Flanders will march " in the general direction of Brussels, its right towards " Hal striking the Schelde at Pecq and the Dendre at " Lessines [that is, right boundary Pecq–Lessines–Hal, " presumably inclusive]. In this march the forcing of " the important river lines of the Schelde and Dendre " is to be combined, as far as necessary, with turning " movements to be carried out by the British Armies.

" (2) The British Armies (Fifth, First, Third and " Fourth), will advance south of the line Pecq–Lessines– " Hal, their right directed via Froidechapelle and " Philippeville on Agimont [3 miles north-west of Givet].

" The task of the British Armies is still to throw the " enemy back on the not easily traversable massif of " the Ardennes, thus cutting his principal lateral " railway line, at the same time assisting the march of " the Group of Armies of Flanders and enabling this " group to cross the principal river lines, the Schelde " and the Dendre, which lie across its line of march.

" The British Armies will themselves be supported " by the French First Army.

[1] See End-paper A and p. 292.

[2] End-paper A does not contain quite all the place-names, but sufficiently illustrate the directive. The railways will be found on End-paper B.

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" (3) The French Armies (First, Tenth, Fifth and " Fourth) and the American First Army will operate " south of the Froidechapelle–Philippeville line.

" Their rôle is :

" French First Army, to support the attack of the " British Armies by marching in the direction of la " Chapelle, Chimay, Givet, and to manœuvre by its " right [this apparently draws the First Army away " from the support of the British in order to help the " French Tenth Army, which is not mentioned in the " Directive] in order to turn the enemy resistance on " the line [river] Serre–Sissonne [15 miles south of " the Serre].

" The French Fifth and Fourth Armies and American " First Army to reach the region of Mezières–Sedan " and the Meuse above these towns, gaining the line of " the Aisne by a movement of the two wings : on the " left (French Fifth Army) in the direction of Château " Porcien ; on the right (French Fourth Army and " American First Army) in the direction of Buzancy, " le Chesne ".

From being the spearhead of the British advance, the Fourth Army was now charged by G.H.Q., for the moment, with the duty of establishing a defensive flank facing east to protect the main operation as laid down in G.H.Q. orders of the 17th, to be carried out by the Third, and First Armies. A considerable part of the front of the Fourth Army was now covered by the Sambre canal and quite unlikely to be counter-attacked. It was therefore possible to withdraw some troops into reserve. This General Rawlinson explained to his corps commanders at a conference during the afternoon of the 19th, when he gave an outline of the next operations. The IX Corps was ordered to take over the sector of the American II Corps by the morning of the 21st, the two divisions of the latter, on relief, marching to an area east of Amiens. They had been in the line practically since the 24th September, had suffered heavy casualties and required rest. The Australian field artillery, most of the heavy artillery and other British corps troops with the Americans, were handed to the IX Corps, and one brigade R.G.A. and two siege batteries to the XIII Corps. Thus the Fourth Army was left with only two corps, the IX and XIII.

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NOTE I

The French and Americans on 18th–19th October

(Sketch 26)

The left of the French First Army made some progress on the 18th and 19th. "The right and centre of the XV Corps (next "to the British) made no progress at first, but on the extreme "left, starting at 6.40 a.m. (British zero hour was 5.20 a.m.) . . . "succeeded in capturing Mennevret and reaching Mepas. This "created a breach in the German line and entailed the retreat of "the enemy, who, farther north, fell back in the same way under "the attacks of the British Fourth Army". A general advance of the XV Corps then took place and "towards 4 p.m. the final "objective, the eastern edge of the Andigny Forest, was attained." The XXXVI Corps advanced only imperceptibly in the course of the morning, but in the afternoon made good progress. In the XXXI Corps only the left made any advance and that no farther than the canal. The newly arrived XX Corps merely "pushed the heads of its divisions to the Oise". On the front of the VIII Corps the enemy fell back during the night of the 17th/18th from the angle between the Oise and Serre, and the re-entrant was thus cleared.

"The XV, XXXVI, XXXI and VIII Corps had in the course of "the fighting on the 17th and 18th captured 3,000 prisoners "(more than 2,000 were the share of the XV Corps), with 81 "guns, etc."

On the 18th, the XV and XXXVI Corps closed up to the Sambre canal; the XXXI Corps "succeeded in pushing an element (one company) on to the eastern bank of the Oise". The main operation was to be that of the XX and VIII Corps, "to outflank "the line of the Serre and open the way for the Tenth Army". These corps did no more than "make contact with the forward "German defences"; but on the 19th they "began operations" and made a little progress. The XXXVI and XX Corps cleared the west bank of the Oise but they "tried to cross this water-line "in vain".

In the Tenth Army the offensive of the 17th had been postponed, first to the 18th and then to the 19th. On the latter date it made a bite in the enemy line about two miles deep in the centre (Battle of the Serre), and the Fifth Army, on the right of the Tenth, achieved on its 21-mile frontage two small advances in the centre, on bases three miles and one mile wide, respectively.

On the Argonne front, on the 18th, "except for small thrusts "there was again general quiet", and the 19th passed with "smaller scale fighting in the forward zone" (Gallwitz, p. 424).

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NOTE II

The Germans on 18th–19th October

On the 18th, discussion of the terms of the answer to President Wilson was continued without Ludendorff. There seemed every chance of U-boat warfare being abandoned. The naval representative at once informed O.H.L., with the result that Ludendorff telegraphed to the Chancellor saying that he could not concur. "The question to be asked", he said, "is, will the German people "fight for their honour not only with words but actually to the "last man, and thus ensure the possibility of recovery; or will "they allow themselves to be driven to capitulation before "making a supreme effort? By consenting to the abandonment "of U-boat warfare as agreed in the Note, we enter the latter "path".

The Chancellor and his Cabinet regarded Ludendorff's message as mere subterfuge. As one of the members put it, "Ludendorff "has outmanœuvred the Government both strategically and "tactically"; for on the 29th September he had prevented the Government from calling on the nation to rise.

Prince Max made it clear that if he were not allowed to inform President Wilson that unrestricted U-boat warfare would be abandoned, he would resign, and gave warning that a revolution would then break out. Ludendorff still resisted, but finally hit on a method of evading the issue. He telegraphed: "O.H.L. "does not regard itself as a factor of political power. It bears "therefore no political responsibility. Its political consent to "the Note is not necessary". The Note agreeing to the conditions imposed was therefore sent.

The military aspect of the situation was described in a letter from Crown Prince Rupprecht to Prince Max, under date of the 18th (the translation is in Max, ii, p. 157).

> "Our troops are exhausted and their numbers have "dwindled terribly. The number of infantry in an Active "division is seldom as much as 3,000. In general, the infan- "try of a division can be treated as equivalent to one or two "battalions, and in certain cases as only equivalent to two "or three companies. Quantities of machine guns have "been lost, and there is a lack of trained machine-gun teams. "The artillery has also lost a great number of guns and "suffers from a lack of trained gun-layers. In certain "Armies fifty per cent. of the guns are without horses. "There is also a lack of ammunition, and particularly for the "most important kind of guns, such as the 77-mm. field guns, "the light field howitzers and the 10-cm. guns, which can

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" no longer be adequately kept supplied from home. Apart
" from the commanders, regular officers are now only to be
" found occasionally in the higher regimental staffs.

" The morale of the troops has suffered seriously and their
" power of resistance diminishes daily. They surrender in
" hordes, whenever the enemy attacks, and thousands of
" plunderers infest the districts round the bases. We
" have no more prepared lines, and no more can be dug.
" There is a shortage of fuel for the lorries, and when the
" Austrians desert us, and we get no more petrol from
" Rumania, two months will put a stop to our aviation.
" I do not expect much from a *levée en masse* on the model of
" Carnot's at the beginning of the French revolutionary wars;
" it meant much then, because it was put into force at the
" beginning of a war; but we are already in the fifth year
" of the war, and our reserves in men are already exhausted
" to breaking point. Further, how are the war industries
" to carry on in face of a *levée en masse*, when they are not
" even now in a position to fulfil completely the demands
" we make on them?

" We cannot sustain a serious enemy attack, owing to a
" lack of all reserves. If we succeed, by retreating behind
" the serious obstacle of the Meuse, in shortening our front
" considerably, we can hold out there under favourable
" circumstances for one or two months, but only if the enemy
" does not violate Holland's neutrality or drive her to take
" sides against us, and if the Austro-Hungarian troops are
" not withdrawn from the Western Front.

" I should like to add that in every fresh retreat we always
" have to leave a good deal of material behind.

" I do not believe that there is any possibility of holding
" out over December, particularly as the Americans are
" drawing about 300,000 men monthly from beyond the
" ocean. I should like to add that our situation is already
" exceedingly dangerous, and that under certain circumstances
" a catastrophe can occur overnight.

" Ludendorff does not realize the whole seriousness of the
" situation. Whatever happens, we must obtain peace
" before the enemy breaks through into Germany; if he does,
" woe on us!"

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CHAPTER XXII

Battle of the Selle (*continued*)

17th–22nd October

The Night Forcing of the Selle by the Third Army. The Advance to the Schelde and the Scarpe by the First and Third Armies

(Sketches 18, 19, 25, 27, 28)

In the Battle of the Selle, fought by the Fourth Army, the Third Army had co-operated on the 17th October only by means of a "Chinese attack" carried out by its southernmost division. On the two following days the Third Army did not attack, as it was engaged on preparations for an offensive provisionally fixed for the 20th. Various reliefs were carried out, but no changes of importance in its general situation took place. Among minor matters,[1] the bridgehead established by the 2nd Guards Brigade in the northern end of St. Python was withdrawn; and the 57th Brigade (19th Division) placed posts along the railway opposite and south of Haussy.

During the period between the 8th and 19th October the Third Army had taken 6,133 prisoners, and the casualties of the two southern corps, the V and the IV, which had done most of the fighting,[2] had been 5,740 and 2,677, respectively; the casualties of the other two corps for the exact period are not available.

The First Army

In the First Army, the 17th October marked the beginning of a fresh long advance of its centre and left wing as the enemy fell back; there was little opposition except from artillery. The XXII Corps, on the right facing the Selle river, like the Third Army, did not move during the 17th and 18th. The enemy's withdrawal from the strong canal line

[1] See Sketch 27.

[2] See pp. 219 and 249.

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was unexpected, so that although preparations were in progress for crossing the canal in the operation ordered for the 20th, little bridging material was to hand for some hours, and the Germans got a good start.

As the retirement and the consequent pursuit began in the northern sector as a result of the success of the Group of Armies of Flanders, it will be convenient to describe the operations for the 17th, 18th and 19th from the left to right.

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The VIII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Hunter-Weston) was close up to the Haute Deule canal,[1] and a party of the 5/R. Berkshire of the 12th Division (Major-General H. W. Higginson) had forced a crossing during the 16th at Pont à Sault, on the extreme left of the front, under cover of which a pontoon bridge had been constructed during the night of the 16th/17th. At 4 a.m. (17th) the enemy was still holding his line beyond the canal; but at 5.30 a.m. patrols reported that he had retired,[2] and the 36th Brigade crossed by the pontoon bridge and a footbridge on the Courcelles–Evin road; the passages were augmented by 8.40 a.m. on the 18th by a bridge for heavy traffic. On the right the 35th Brigade began crossing by means of a raft at Auby, where by 4.30 p.m. a pontoon bridge was completed. By evening, with scarcely any opposition, both brigades had reached and were beyond the railway Douai–Raimbeaucourt.

Opposition in front of the 8th Division (Major-General W. C. G. Heneker) ceased during the morning; two companies of the 1/Worcestershire (24th Brigade) were able to cross the canal by crawling along the débris of the railway bridge south of Auby and by a boat at Auby, and they went on until they were abreast of the 12th Division line. The leading battalions of the 25th and 23rd Brigades, the 2/Rifle Brigade and 2/Middlesex, found Douai evacuated, and about 2 p.m. entered the town, a great part of which was burning. Not only the enemy but also the inhabitants had disappeared.

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[1] See Sketch 19.

[2] The enemy had not lost much time, as Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group of Armies had received O.H.L. orders for the retirement to the Hermann Position only at 3.10 p.m. (British time) on the 16th. (See Note II at the end of Chapter XIX).

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The advance of the artillery and trains had been much hampered by the difficulties of crossing the canals, and more bridge construction was taken in hand as soon as possible by the engineers of both divisions.

In the Canadian Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Currie), the left brigade (1st) of the 1st Division began crossing the canal at 11 a.m., the 2nd in the early afternoon. The former, after securing a bridgehead halted; the commander of the latter, Br.-General R. P. Clark, decided to push on in order to prevent the enemy from using the high ground north of Erchin to interfere with the passage of the canal. The 8th Battalion, against weakening opposition, reached Erchin by 10 p.m., and, in spite of a dark night and mist, by 3 a.m. the brigade was in possession of the Erchin–Lewarde ridge.

On most of the front of the 4th Canadian Division (Major-General Sir D. Watson) the enemy rear guards held on to the canal bank until evening, so that it was not until 7.30 p.m. that divisional orders were issued for the 11th and 10th Brigades (Br.-Generals V. W. Odlum and R. J. F. Hayter) to push across to follow the retiring enemy. Owing to opposition it was 10.30 p.m. before the 11th Canadian Brigade crossed the canal by the broken bridges and a float-bridge constructed by the divisional engineers. A first bound was made to the Aubigny–Cantin road, about three thousand yards ahead, and at 1.30 a.m. (18th) a second advance took place to the final objective, Villers au Tertre, which was reached without opposition and where touch was gained on the left with the 2nd Canadian Brigade.

The 10th Canadian Brigade found the bridges on its front very thoroughly demolished and had to extemporize means, so that the crossing of the canal was not completed until 1 a.m. (18th); but by 5.35 a.m. the two leading brigades had reached the objective, Féchain–Villers au Tertre (exclusive).

News of the retirement of the enemy on the front of the 1st and 4th Canadian Divisions did not reach the 2nd Canadian Division (Major-General Sir H. Burstall), aligned on the east-west reach of the Sensée canal, until 6 p.m., and it was 7.30 p.m. before scouts of the 6th Canadian Brigade reported the enemy gone from opposite Hem Lenglet and the bridge passable. Bridgeheads were at

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once formed both there and to the east of Wasnes au Bac, where the 6th Engineer Battalion constructed footbridges during the night. Thus by 8.30 a.m. (18th) the 29th Battalion had reached the high ground north of Wasnes au Bac. The 4th Canadian Brigade, opposite which resistance continued longer, managed to build a bridge over the canal at Paillencourt during the night, but its crossing did not begin until 9 a.m. on the 18th.

The advance of more than three miles by five brigades of the Canadian Corps, over unknown country in darkness and increasing mist, against an enemy who might stand at any moment, was a remarkable piece of good work by the staffs and an exhibition of persistence on the part of the infantry. Bridging operations were begun as soon as possible by the Canadian Corps under the Chief Engineer, Major-General W. B. Lindsay : the 1st Canadian Division had three pontoon bridges completed by 6 p.m., and a heavy bridge by 11 p.m. ; the 4th had one pontoon bridge ready by midnight (17th/18th) and another by 7 a.m. (18th).

The VIII and Canadian Corps of the First Army continued the pursuit on the 18th, at first against very little opposition ; later they met with resistance from every village and locality; but the day ended with both corps on a nearly north and south line some three to five miles from their starting positions. Progress was hindered by many factors : by the fog ; by entire ignorance, except from the map of the country which was seamed with dykes and wet ditches ; by complete uncertainty as to the position of the enemy ; by the necessity, when opposition was encountered in localities, of waiting until sufficient artillery was across the canal—there was, in fact, not enough to deal with the enemy rear guards until the afternoon ; and lastly by the fatigue of the infantry after the marching and skirmishing which continued late into the night.

The 2nd Canadian Brigade, though it had not gained possession of the Erchin ridge until 3 a.m., was the first to move ; it went forward again at 6 a.m. and met with opposition from enemy rear guards at Masny and Ecaillon, but turned them out ; its left was secured by the 1st Canadian Brigade coming up. The 11th Canadian Brigade found Auberchicourt, a long village extending right across its front,

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still held by the enemy; the 10th had to wait until 9.30 p.m. before an artillery bombardment enabled it to take Emerchicourt; the 6th took Marquette, but was unable to shift the enemy from the high ground beyond the village. On the extreme right of the corps, the 4th Canadian Brigade sent the 19th Battalion across the canal by a footbridge constructed in the early morning, and it formed up on the right of the new line of the 6th; farther east, the 18th Battalion found Hordain still held by the enemy.

The divisions of the VIII. Corps reached their objective virtually unopposed.

On the 19th the German retirement extended to the whole line in front of the First Army; so the XXII Corps was able to join in the advance of the VIII and Canadian Corps.

Little opposition was offered to the VIII Corps, which began to advance at 5.30 a.m., except by long-range artillery fire; but it was delayed by broken bridges, craters in, and trees felled across the roads. The objective, the Marchiennes–Orchies road, was, however, reached by midday by the 12th and 8th Divisions. Patrols of two squadrons of the 4th Hussars then discovered the enemy established some three miles ahead in the slightly higher and very enclosed country about le Quenne, Sars et Rosières and Brillon, and a general advance was made to a line east of Marchiennes Forest, through which patrols were sent.

The Canadian Corps, starting after the fog thinned at 9 a.m., met with very little opposition, and it reached its objective line. In the evening Wallers, beyond this line, was occupied by cyclists; Haveluy was found to be evacuated by a patrol of the Canadian Light Horse—the Hermann Position of the Germans was some five miles farther to the east. The western part of the town of Denain was occupied by the 10th Canadian Brigade in the evening, the eastern part being still held by an enemy rear guard. The advance had shortened the front, and after the 2nd Canadian Division had gone about a mile and a half, as far as Bouchereuil, it was squeezed out and was sent back into reserve.

A general gain of about six miles had been made by the centre and left corps of the First Army, so that all of it was now up level with the Third Army on the Selle.

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No alteration had taken place in the situation of the XXII Corps during the period 15th to the 18th October[1]; for its right wing was close to the Selle position and its left would be exposed by any further advance until the other corps of the First Army had drawn forward, which they were now doing. On the 19th the 153rd Brigade (Br.-General W. Green) of the 51st Division (Major-General G. T. C. Carter-Campbell), the left formation of the corps, at midday found Lieu St. Amand still held by the enemy; but in the afternoon he began shelling it, and at 3 p.m. the brigade advanced. It passed through and round the village without opposition, and by 11 p.m. had reached the Noyelles–Neuville road, and later in the night the Noyelles–Denain railway, establishing touch with the Canadian Corps. The 154th Brigade (Br.-General K. G. Buchanan) also moved forward in the afternoon and without opposition crossed the Selle between Fleury and Noyelles. This left a gap between the 51st Division and the 4th Division, now on the right in place of the 49th; but as the 4th Division was due to attack in a few hours, at 2 a.m. on the 20th, to capture Saulzoir and Haspres, the gap was of no importance.

At the close of the 19th October, the British Armies were on a continuous north-south line, the Fourth and Third Armies and the right division of the First Army close up to the Hermann Position, which from near Haspres on the Selle ran north-east to Valenciennes and Condé, there turning N.N.W. and following the Schelde, so that the left of the First Army, the Fifth Army and the Second Army were still about ten miles from it.

The Third Army[2]

On the 20th the Third and First Armies advanced together. G.H.Q. orders of the 17th had given a number of positions on the east bank of the Selle as marking the line from which the next general offensive was to be launched. The greater part of the Third Army was still on the west bank and, even where the river had been crossed, the troops were no

[1] See Sketch 18.
[2] See Sketch 27.

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more than just over the waterway. There were at least six German divisions in line opposite the Third Army, with three more in close support, so, as only seven British divisions were to attack on the 20th, numbers were little in our favour.[1] It was therefore judged necessary by General Byng, as a preliminary, for the leading divisions of the Third Army to cross the Selle at once and gain a bridgehead on the high ground beyond it in order to have a favourable jumping-off line. This high ground consisted of a series of long spurs or ridges running west of north, separated by streams, the Béart, which flows into the Selle at Solesmes, and the Harpies and the St. Georges, which meet the Ecaillon, at Vendegies and thus flow into the Schelde.

The following orders were accordingly issued on the 17th by the Third Army; the attack was to be made by all four corps, and they were to secure a large segment of ground, its base marked at its ends by Montay (exclusive) and Saulzoir and its arc extending eastwards a little over two miles to the third of the ridges that lies between the Harpies and the St. Georges. The attack was to be made as a surprise without any preliminary bombardment, with zero hour at 2 a.m. on the 20th, when the moon would be full. Any necessary wire-cutting was to be carried out independently by corps.[2]

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[1] Among the opposing divisions were *44th Reserve*, *1st Guard Reserve*, *26th*, *185th*, *48th Reserve* (Haussy) and *9th Reserve*, with the *30th* behind the *1st Guard Reserve*, the *4th* behind the *185th*, and the *18th Reserve* behind Haspres as *Eingreif* divisions. "Guard Res. Regt. No. 2" speaks of the "twelvefold" British superiority on this day, and others follow suit.

[2] The allotment of artillery was as follows:—

V Corps (G.O.C. R.A., Br.-General R. P. Benson):
5 heavy brigades (XIII, XVII, XII, LIV and LVIII R.G.A.), under Br.-General A. M. Tyler.
38th Division: 4 field brigades (of the 33rd and 38th Divisions), under Br.-General T. E. Topping.
17th Division: 4 field brigades (of the 17th and 21st Divisions and the XXXIV Army Brigade), under Br.-General P. Wheatley.

IV Corps (G.O.C. R.A., Br.-General J. G. Geddes):
4 heavy brigades (LVI, LVII, XC and XCII R.G.A.), under Br.-General T. E. Marshall.
5th Division: 4 field brigades (of the 5th and 37th Divisions), under Br.-General A. H. Hussey;
42nd Division: 6 field brigades (of the 42nd and 63rd Divisions and the I and III New Zealand), under Br.-General F. W. H. Walshe.

VI Corps (G.O.C. R.A., Br.-General J. G. Rotton):
6 heavy brigades (XXXII, XXXIX, LX, LXIII, LXXXIV and LXXXVIII R.G.A.), under Br.-General A. Ellershaw.

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Lieut.-General Shute, in the V Corps, ordered the advance to be made in four bounds, the first over the le Cateau–Solesmes railway, and the others to the three ridges in succession. The right flank division was to make only the first three bounds in order that a defensive flank might be formed. Of the artillery at corps disposal, the eight brigades of field artillery and two of heavy, besides the 60-pdrs. were to be used in the barrage. This would halt from 2 a.m. to 2.20 a.m. to protect the first objective, from 3.14 a.m. to 3.56 a.m. in front of the second, but otherwise would proceed at 100 yards in 4 minutes. The rest of the heavy artillery was to be employed on special bombardments and counter-battery work, and every available machine gun and trench mortar was to barrage the slopes and ravines on the eastern side of the river. The 66th Division (Fourth Army) on the right was not attacking, but its machine guns would give assistance. The advance, in fact, would be shrouded by a storm of shells and bullets.

The 38th Division (Major-General T. A. Cubitt) sent the 113th and 114th Brigades (Br.-Generals H. E. ap Rhys Pryce and T. R. C. Price) to the attack, with one tank and one troop of cyclists attached to each. Twelve footbridges were available for each brigade, and two artillery bridges were to be constructed as soon as possible. The night proved wet and misty, and in spite of the moon the light was not very good, but the leading battalions crossed without a hitch. The 13th and 14/R. Welch Fusiliers encountered considerable resistance at the railway, but once this was overcome, with the help of a tank (which was soon afterwards ditched) the advance, without losing the barrage, went on quickly to the second objective. The 13th and 14/Welch (114th Brigade) were able to rush the railway; but they met with resistance in a ravine beyond. Here also, when this had been dealt with, the advance was continued fairly easily, though the

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62nd Division: 4 field brigades (of the 3rd and 62nd Divisions), under Br.-General A. T. Anderson.

Guards Division: 6 field brigades (of the Guards and 2nd Divisions, XIV R.H.A. and LXXXVI Army), under Br.-General F. A. Wilson.

XVII Corps (G.O.C. R.A., Br.-General E. H. Willis):

3 heavy brigades (XXXV, LXII and LXXI), under Br.-General N. G. Barron.

19th Division: 8 field brigades (of the 24th and 61st Divisions and LXXII, XCIII, 315th (Army) and II New Zealand), under Br.-General E. J. R. Peel.

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tank had been ditched before it could come into action, and the third and final objective was gained according to plan. Thus an echeloned defensive flank had been formed. The 38th Division had suffered about 460 casualties and taken 212 prisoners with 4 field guns, etc.

The 17th Division (Major-General P. R. Robertson) was not to attack Neuvilly frontally, and in order that it might have sufficient room to deploy north of the village, it took over three hundred yards of frontage from the 5th Division after dark on the 19th. The 50th Brigade (Br.-General J. F. R. Hope) was to capture the first and second objectives, and the 51st (Br.-General R. M. Dudgeon) then to pass through it to the third and fourth. Eighteen footbridges were constructed during the night by the 93rd Field Company R.E., and the leading companies of the two attacking battalions, the 7/East Yorkshire and 6/Dorsetshire, were able to form up on the far bank of the Selle before zero hour. The railway was taken after fairly severe fighting and the second objective reached by 3.30 a.m. Meantime the 10/West Yorkshire had attacked Neuvilly on both sides; stiff resistance was offered and the village was not finally cleared until 5 a.m., a hundred prisoners and 34 machine guns being captured. All three battalions of the 51st Brigade, the 7/Border Regiment, 7/Lincolnshire and 10/Sherwood Foresters, in line, passed through the 50th at 3.56 a.m., and, helped by two tanks (one of which was knocked out, whilst the other developed mechanical trouble), took the third objective about 5 a.m. without difficulty. When they went forward again at 7 a.m. without a barrage, after going a certain distance, they ran into machine-gun fire from the ridge which was the final objective, and had to fall back. About 10 a.m. an enemy battery firing at point blank range drove a company of the 7/Border Regiment out of Amerval, but the village was re-occupied by midday.

The advance of the 5th and 42nd Divisions of the IV Corps on the left to the fourth objective had been similarly checked, so a joint operation of the 17th, 5th and 42nd Divisions under a barrage, in which 10 per cent. of smoke shell was to be fired, was arranged for 4 p.m., and it was completely successful.

On the 17th Division's front the enemy managed to retake Amerval a second time about 8 p.m., but it was recaptured at 1 a.m. (21st) by the 7/Border Regiment. Thus, like the

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38th, the 17th Division had taken all its objectives. The numbers of its casualties and of its prisoners were both close on 450. During the day the 93rd Field Company R.E. constructed two bridges over the Selle for wheeled traffic and the 77th built a tank bridge west of Neuvilly.

The IV Corps (Lieut.-General Sir M. Harper) had two objectives before the final one, the second, except on the extreme right being omitted; but as far as the third objective the left flank was to be refused in order to enable the left division to attack without being enfiladed from Solesmes, should there be delay in the capture of that little town by the VI Corps.

The front line of the 5th Division (Major-General J. Ponsonby),[1] being already on the east bank of the Selle, the 527th Field Company R.E. had been able to begin bridging on the night of the 14th/15th October, and it had constructed sixteen footbridges and two artillery bridges. Thus the leading infantry was able to form up on the eastern bank without difficulty. In the advance at 2 a.m., the 13th Brigade (Br.-General A. T. Beckwith) led, and the 2/K.O.S.B. and 16/R. Warwickshire took the first objective without much opposition. Then the 1/Devonshire and 1/East Surrey of the 95th Brigade (Br.-General C. B. Norton) passed through, the former stopping on the second objective until relieved by V Corps troops, whilst the East Surrey went straight on to the third objective. The advance from this line, as we have seen, was checked and the fourth objective was not won until the combined attack was made by the 17th, 5th and 42nd Divisions at 4 p.m. The 5th Division had suffered 420 casualties and had taken 341 prisoners.

In the 42nd Division (Major-General A. Solly Flood), the 427th Field Company R.E. had begun bridging the Selle on the 15th, and by the night of the 19th/20th nine footbridges and two pontoon bridges for artillery were ready. The 1/5th East Lancashire (with its band playing) and the 1/10th Manchester of the 126th Brigade (Br.-General T. H. S.

[1] The 5th Division, which had returned from Italy at the beginning of April as a 12-battalion formation was, between 2nd and 6th October reduced to nine battalions. The 15/R. Warwickshire and 12/Gloucestershire were disbanded, the 14/R Warwickshire became the pioneer battalion, the 1/6th Argyll being transferred to the 51st Division.

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Marchant) led the advance. Very fierce fighting took place on the strongly held railway line, and it was two and a half hours before it was finally mopped up by the companies detailed for the purpose. The portion to the north of the attack up to the edge of Solesmes was dealt with by a company of the Manchester, which eventually got touch of the 62nd Division. In the sector of the 42nd Division, in which the second objective was omitted, the leading companies, by no means unopposed, went straight on to the third, and, in spite of losing the barrage temporarily, they reached it nearly up to time. Here at 7 a.m. the 1/5th and 1/6th Manchester of the 127th Brigade (Br.-General Hon. A. M. Henley) passed through to an intermediate objective, interpolated because the advance to the fourth objective entailed a right wheel. The right, as had befallen the 17th and 5th Divisions, was however, driven back to the third objective. In the renewed attack at 4 p.m. the whole of the intermediate objective was taken, and Major-General Solly Flood ordered the advance of the 127th Brigade to the fourth objective, which the 1/6th Manchester carried out at 9 p.m. without much difficulty. The two brigades had 509 casualties and had taken over six hundred prisoners.

The VI Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Haldane) had a less simple task than the V and IV Corps, for none of its troops were across the Selle. All the bridges in its sector had been destroyed, and although there was a ford at St. Python, the river was a serious obstacle, being about twenty feet wide and 4 to 6 feet deep, with banks in places about 10 feet above waterlevel, whilst débris from the railway south of Solesmes had partially dammed the stream causing a flood extending for a thousand yards to the south, which practically prevented bridging in this reach. The little town of Solesmes itself, strongly defended in front, lies with St. Python on the north, near the mouth of a deep valley at the junction of the Béart with the Selle. As it was full of French civilians, whilst the full barrage crept past the sides of the town, the barrage over it was ordered to be limited to shrapnel and machine-gun bullets, which the inhabitants could avoid by going into their cellars.

The final objective of the corps was the northward continuation of the fourth and final objective of the V and IV Corps along the ridge to St. Martin. Two intermediate

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objectives, the one in front of, and the other behind Solesmes, were fixed. The first ran round the south-west, west and north sides of the little town and thence to Haussy (exclusive), and the second, or "Solesmes Line", was, for the 62nd Division (Major-General Sir R. Whigham) along the eastern edge of Solesmes and thence along the Solesmes–Vendegies road, which formed the first objective for the Guards Division on the left.

The 186th Brigade (Br.-General J. L. G. Burnett), with the 2/4th York & Lancaster (187th Brigade) attached, was to capture Solesmes. It sent the York & Lancaster across the Selle by bridges in the 42nd Division sector to take the southern part of the town and of the second intermediate objective, and it was in position on the eastern bank before Zero. The other three battalions were to operate north of the town, and before zero hour, the 2/4th Duke of Wellington's covering their combined front, took the railway (here on the western bank) with scarcely any opposition. When the barrage lifted at 2 a.m. the battalion continued on to its destination, the west bank of the Selle, where it attracted considerable machine-gun fire from the other side. Before Zero, too, a company of the 5/Duke of Wellington's waded across at St. Python unopposed and the 460th and 461st Field Companies R.E. then placed footbridges unobserved in the dark. By these bridges the rest of the Duke's crossed without casualties and were on the eastern bank by zero hour. After some hard fighting the companies pressed on, one dropping posts to form a right defensive flank, and reached the first intermediate objective, which in their case was the final one. Meantime, the 2/4th Hampshire, following the Duke's had turned southwards towards Solesmes, and with the York & Lancaster from the south, had by 7.15 a.m. mopped up the town. By means of a large-scale mosaic photograph it had been possible to allot definite objectives to each platoon of the two battalions, and confusion was thus avoided, whilst recognition was provided for by the wearing of a white armband and the use of a password.

The "Solesmes Line" having thus been reached, it remained for the 185th Brigade (Br.-General Viscount Hampden) to carry out the second stage of the attack. The 8/West Yorkshire and the 2/20th London passing south and north of Solesmes reached the first intermediate objec-

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tive, their jumping-off position, behind the "Solesmes Line" and north of the town, in good time. They began the advance at 7 a.m., and by 10 a.m. or before, without great opposition, had reached the northward continuation of the original fourth objective, the West Yorkshire having to form a right defensive flank until the 42nd Division came up. Junction was made by the London battalion on the left with the Guards Division, and a counter-attack which struck this part of the line about 4 p.m. was completely broken up by artillery, machine-gun and rifle fire.

The 62nd Division had gained all its objectives and 699 prisoners at a cost of 452 casualties.

The attacks of the Guards Division (Major-General T. G. Matheson), the left division of the VI Corps, and of the 19th Division (Major-General G. D. Jeffreys), which covered the whole front of the XVII Corps, were made throughout in combination. In the Guards Division the 1st and 3rd Guards Brigade (Br.-Generals C. R. Champion de Crespigny and C. P. Heywood), relieved the 2nd Guards Brigade two hours before Zero. Eight floating footbridges over the Selle for each brigade and two trestle bridges for field artillery (one ready at 1.45 a.m. and the other soon after daylight) were constructed during the night by the 75th and 76th Field Companies R.E., assisted by the pioneers (4/Coldstream Guards), without discovery by the enemy until the last floating bridge was being laid, when a few ineffective shots were fired. At Zero the brigades began crossing and at 2.23 a.m., after forming for attack on the St. Python–Haussy road, advanced to their first objective just beyond the river which was taken with only slight casualties. At 3.10 a.m. the advance was resumed, the extreme left of the 1st Guards Brigade and the 3rd Guards Brigade having to make a slight right wheel in order that the the division might be aligned north-south parallel to the Solesmes–Vendegies road on the ridge above the Selle. From this road both brigades were to go forward to their final objective at 4.6 a.m. Some resistance was offered on the road, mainly in the centre and particularly from Chapelle Hausse, long enough to cause the barrage to be lost, and the brigade did not go forward from the road until 5.30 a.m. The final objective which overlooked the Harpies valley was reached by the whole line by 7 a.m. Patrols found the enemy still holding Vertain, in that valley, and the ridge beyond. No

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further advance was made, and, to ensure the position gained being held against artillery attack, sections of 18-pdrs. which had been pushed across the Selle at Zero were brought up and during the morning three brigades of field artillery were advanced close up to the west bank. The 55th Field Company R.E. was directed to construct a tank bridge on the piers of the demolished road bridge at St. Python, but many hours had first to be spent in clearing the débris of a brick railway bridge over the road before the material could be got to site. It was 5 p.m. before construction work could be begun, and then carried on under shell-fire, sometimes with gas masks on, so that it was not ready until 8 a.m. (21st). At 1 a.m. (21st) a line of outposts was pushed down to the Harpies river, but it passed round the western outskirts of Vertain which was still held by the enemy.

The losses of the Guards Division on the 20th had been 229, and the number of prisoners 292.

The 19th Division, working in co-operation with the Guards Division on the right and the 4th Division on the left, had fixed as its first objective the farther side of Haussy, and thence a line to the south-east corner of Saulzoir, which entailed bridging the Selle and capturing Haussy and the railway line. The attack was to be carried out by the 57th and 58th Brigades (Br.-General A. J. F. Eden and A. E. Glasgow). By the evening of the 19th, however, patrols had ascertained that the enemy had evacuated Haussy and the railway line, so that both brigades were able to cross the Selle before zero hour on twenty footbridges brought down on handcarts and laid by the 82nd and 94th Field Companies R.E., which had previously constructed two trestle bridges for field artillery. There was time to alter the starting line of the barrage, and guided by the bursts of thermit shell, one round of which was fired at each lift of the barrage to mark the flanks of each attacking battalion, the first advance to clear the railway was successful in spite of some resistance from isolated machine-gun posts. The final objective, on the high ground overlooking the Harpies stream was then taken by all battalions (8/Gloucestershire, 10/Worcestershire, 2/Wiltshire and 9/R. Welch Fusiliers) without much difficulty. At 2.45 a.m. two batteries had crossed the Selle for the close support of the infantry; at 3.30 a.m. the remainder of the two brigades to which

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these batteries belonged moved forward to the Selle, and at 5 a.m. three more brigades crossed the river by batteries. In the evening the left of the division, in touch with the 4th Division on the left, advanced another thousand yards up to the edge of the plateau where the ground begins to fall to the Harpies stream. On the right, too, a line was dug five hundred yards beyond the objective and touch established with the Guards Division.[1]

All four corps of the Third Army had taken their objectives, and a line had been established on the high ground beyond the Selle. The V and IV Corps had met with considerable opposition in some stages of their advance, and it was not until night fell that this was finally overcome. The resistance to the VI and XVII Corps had been less obstinate and they had been able to reach their objectives during the morning.

THE FIRST ARMY[2]

All three corps of the First Army advanced on the 20th, although it had originally been intended that the XXII Corps only should attack, in conjunction with the Third Army, in order to cover the left flank of the latter. They had to deal with machine-gun parties and rear guards of the Germans holding localities in advance of the Hermann Position.[3]

The 4th Division (Major-General C. H. T. Lucas)[4] of the XXII Corps had orders to attack at 2 a.m., that is at the same hour as the Third Army, with Saulzoir and the high ground fifteen hundred yards beyond as final objective. For this, the 10th Brigade (Br.-General J. Greene) was detailed; after it was across the Selle, the 11th Brigade (Br.-General W. J. Webb-Bowen) was to follow and attack Haspres from the south, and then similarly make for the high ground beyond.

Signs of enemy retirement were noticed during the 19th, and during the night the 2/Duke of Wellington's (10th Brigade) pushed through Saulzoir with little opposition and

[1] The casualties of the 19th Division are given for the period 20th-23rd October, not for the 20th alone, and will be mentioned later.

[2] See Sketch 28.

[3] There appear to have been at least 11 divisions of the German *Seventeenth* and *Sixth Armies* opposed to the First Army, with five in reserve.

[4] Major-General L. J. Lipsett had been killed on the 14th October.

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reached the eastern edge of the village, the first objective. At 3.10 a.m., according to the original programme, the 2/Seaforth Highlanders, in co-operation with the 19th Division (Third Army) on the right, passed through and covered by a barrage fired by five brigades of field artillery[1] reached the final objective on the high ground with little loss. The 11th Brigade, finding Haspres clear of the enemy, also advanced without opposition to the final objective. In the evening, as on the left of the 19th Division, a further advance was made to the southern edge of Verchain with the left on le Grand Bois.

In the 51st Division, the 154th Brigade, already across the Selle, did not begin its advance until 5 a.m. After passing the Fleury–Croix Ste. Marie road it was held up by fire from the railway a quarter of a mile away and from the higher ground behind, and it was not until after dark that the brigade could go forward again, when it reached the objective, the eastern edges of le Grand Bois and the wood north of it and the high ground farther north. The 153rd Brigade crossed the Selle by extemporized bridges before dawn and passed through Douchy, on the east bank, about 6 a.m. without opposition ; it was then stopped by machine-gun fire, but a short bombardment by the 255th Brigade R.F.A. at 10.45 a.m. enabled the advance to be resumed. The left (7/Black Watch) reached the Schelde canal east of Denain by 5 p.m., but the right was hampered by the 154th Brigade being held up until dark, and it was 10 p.m. before the 1/6th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders cleared Haulchin and made connection with the 154th Brigade.

In the Canadian Corps the 4th and 1st Divisions (Major-Generals Sir D. Watson and A. C. Macdonell) continued the advance at 5 a.m. The 10th Canadian Brigade met with considerable opposition from machine guns in Denain, of which town it already held the western edge. After forcing its way through Denain the brigade found the Germans holding the railway embankment east and north of Wavre-chain. This village was bombarded for half an hour at 2.30 p.m. ; but it was not until a further shelling at 6 p.m. that the enemy cleared off and the embankment was occupied.

[1] One brigade of 4th Division, two of 49th and the 175th and 282nd Army, under Br.-General C. A. Sykes.

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The 11th Canadian Brigade passed through Haveluy without opposition, but encountering heavy fire beyond it could get no farther than the railway east of the village.

The 3rd and 1st Canadian Brigades (Lieut.-Colonel C. E. Bent, acting for Br.-General Tuxford, who was on leave, and Br.-General W. A. Griesbach) started at 9 a.m. with orders to halt if opposition became serious. The 3rd passed through Wallers without opposition; its left was then heavily fired on from the Forêt de Vicoigne. Guns were brought up and the edge of the forest which was giving trouble was bombarded; this did not quell the enemy machine guns and no further advance could be made. The 1st Canadian Brigade cleared the Bois des Eclusettes, an outlier of the Forêt de Vicoigne, and reached the Wallers–St. Amand railway, east of Hasnon; then opposition became considerable, and it was not until night that the whole front line was on the railway, a platoon occupying Grand Bray, half a mile ahead which the enemy had evacuated.

Owing to difficulties of supply caused by the enemy's destruction of bridges and culverts and the mining of roads in a low-lying country intersected with water-channels, where movement off the roads was difficult and slow, Lieut.-General Hunter-Weston issued orders in the evening of the 19th to the VIII Corps that no troops other than strong patrols were to advance beyond a south–north line passing just east of Warlaing, Brillon, Sars et Rosières and Sameon Very little opposition was encountered in reaching this line and in going beyond it, as the Hermann Position was at the end of the day still eight miles distant.

The 8th Division (Major-General W. C. G. Heneker), without opposition, occupied the second and third of the above-named four villages—the first had been reached on the 19th—and Boussignies, more than a mile beyond Brillon, and, in order to keep touch with the Canadian Corps on the right, also Petit Cataing, two miles beyond the limit line.

The 12th Division (Major-General H. W. Higginson) met with no opposition, except at Landas, a mile and a half short of Sameon, where a small enemy rear guard was driven out, and by evening the division was established on the limit line in touch with the Fifth Army on the left.

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The 20th October ended therefore with the Fourth, Third and First Armies in line across the Selle for its whole length to its junction with the Schelde at Denain, which itself had been captured by the Canadians, and thence northwards.

Wet weather prevailed during the 21st and 22nd. No change occurred in the situation of the Third Army[1], and the bringing up of ammunition and other preparations for the offensive of the 23rd were continued; but as the Army was close up to the Hermann Position, considerable shelling was experienced. On the front of the First Army[2] there was no severe fighting: its right was held up on the Ecaillon, but the centre and left made considerable progress against the enemy, who was retiring on the Hermann Position which in this sector was behind the Schelde.

The operations of the XXII Corps, on the right, were carried out by the 4th and 51st Divisions, which were to press the enemy and gain ground "as long as only slight resistance" is met with and he continues to withdraw". They descended the slopes leading down to the Ecaillon, and reached the road from Verchain to Thiant, taking the latter place, which was subsequently heavily shelled. As the eastern bank of the stream was strongly held, they made no attempt to proceed farther.

The Canadian Corps made good progress in its approach march to the Hermann Position. The 4th Canadian Division resumed its advance at 6 a.m. Patrols entered Prouvy and Rouvignies, beyond Denain, and to the north cavalry and cyclists found Oisy and Hérin clear of the enemy. Farther eastward the hamlets of St. Leger and la Sentinelle, on the hills overlooking the Schelde, were still held by the Germans; but, after a short bombardment at midday by the III Brigade Canadian Field Artillery, they were taken and a line east of them occupied. Aubry, to the north of Hérin, was passed through and a line east of it reached with little opposition.

The 1st Canadian Division, pushing on at 9 a.m. through the Fôret de Vicoigne, encountered only slight opposition until it approached the Valenciennes–St. Amand high road

[1] See Sketch 27.
[2] See Sketch 28.

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and railway, which, though nearly parallel to each other, crossed in the centre of its front. The enemy had many machine guns in action, and it was not until 6 p.m. that Vicoigne village was captured by the 3rd Canadian Brigade, and not until midnight that resistance ceased in Raismes to the south. The 1st Canadian Brigade established an outpost line five hundred yards west of the railway ; but during the night the enemy evacuated his position near St. Amand, and by 6.30 a.m. (22nd) the 3rd Battalion, on the left, had occupied the railway line on its front.

In view of the difficulties of supply already mentioned, the VIII Corps was directed to make only a slight advance on the 21st to the general line Hasnon–Rosult–Rumegnies, with advanced parties pushed out toward St. Amand and Lecelles and north of the last-named place, where touch was to be gained with the Fifth Army. This programme was carried out with very little difficulty. Advanced troops of the 8th Division entered St. Amand during the afternoon, and found it full of French inhabitants and civilians from Douai, many of whom were killed and wounded by the shelling which the Germans opened after leaving the town. At night an outpost line was pushed towards the Scarpe, all the bridges over which were found broken, with the ruins of them under machine-gun fire.

The 12th Division, after reaching Lecelles, sent out reconnoitring parties which discovered that the bridges over the Scarpe in front of its sector, two miles away, were still intact, and plans were accordingly made to seize them in the early morning.

On the 22nd the XXII Corps, aligned on the western bank of the Ecaillon, stood fast, waiting to attack in co-operation with the Third Army on the 23rd and 24th. The Canadian Corps again made good progress. The 10th Brigade of the 4th Canadian Division, starting at 7 a.m., though hampered by water reservoirs and extensive floods to the south of Valenciennes, by 10 a.m. had occupied the Faubourg de Paris on the south of the town, and the outskirts of St. Waast on the west, where further progress was stopped by fire ; whilst the 11th Brigade, after crossing the St. Amand road north of St. Waast without opposition, by evening had

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reached the western bank of the Schelde canal between the northern suburbs of Valenciennes and Bruay.

The 3rd Canadian Division (Major-General F. O. W. Loomis) took the place of the 1st, which went into corps reserve, and its 9th and 7th Brigades (Br.-Generals D. M. Ormond and J. A. Clarke) advanced through the great Forêt de Raismes with little opposition, except from machine-gun fire on the left, where the VIII Corps was not so far forward. The 9th Canadian Brigade reached the railway beyond the forest, a mile from the Schelde, between Bruay and Thiers, whence the 7th carried the line northward along the edge of the forest to Odomez, with a left defensive flank thrown back to keep touch with the VIII Corps.

In that corps the 8th Division had on its front the Scarpe with much inundated ground on either side of it, intersected by drainage channels large and small. Beyond the river lay a ribbon development of suburbs along the various roads, which are slightly raised on embankments. The general instructions issued by Major-General Heneker forbade the forcing of the passages of the river, and ordered, if they were strongly held, that the roads should be improved and bridging material collected. During the night of the 21st/22nd, however, a small party of the 1/Sherwood Foresters (24th Brigade) managed to cross the river by the débris of the railway bridge south of St. Amand. On the morning of the 22nd another crossing was made on the road leading to rows of houses called la Croisette, whence machine-gun fire was proceeding. This fire and the difficulty of getting men and guns along the inundated roads and over the many broken bridges prevented much progress; nevertheless, by evening a line had been established east of the Scarpe among the houses of la Croisette, Etoquois and Cubray, and touch obtained on the right with the defensive flank of the Canadian Corps.

In the 12th Division, the moon being bright after midnight, Major-General Higginson decided to seize the crossings of the Scarpe and the various small streams and channels on either side of it by an advance at 1 a.m. (22nd). The 37th and 36th Brigades (Br.-Generals A. B. Incledon-Webber and C. S. Owen) were supported, the one by two brigades of artillery and the other by a single brigade, and to each were allotted a field company R.E. and a machine-gun company,

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whilst all available heavy artillery was to fire on selected points east of the streams. A south-north line passing through the western edges of Fresnoy and le Manoir was made the starting line which the main guards of the advanced guards were to cross at zero hour.

The advance of the 6/R. West Kent of the 37th Brigade was at first unopposed, and Nivelle was entered; but the bridge east of the village was found to be blown up and attempts to cross the Scarpe were unsuccessful. The 9/Royal Fusiliers of the 36th Brigade soon came under fire, but reached Fresnoy and captured a little hill to the south-east. After this, as the right of the Fifth Army on the north was also held up, no further progress could be made. Here the Germans still held the line of the Scarpe, while to the south on the First Army front they were in position behind the Schelde and the Ecaillon. The Third Army, however, was across the Selle, so that the enemy lines to the northward were liable to be outflanked.

On a far wider field of manoeuvre, as divisions were becoming available owing to the reduction of the French front by the convergent advance of the Allies, Maréchal Foch had on the 20th issued the first orders to General Pétain for the assembly of a force in Lorraine, east and west of the Moselle, for attacks, one northwards toward Luxembourg and the other north-eastward towards the Sarre.[1]

NOTE

THE FRENCH AND AMERICANS DURING 20TH–22ND OCTOBER[2]

(Sketch 26)

The French Armies were not very active in this period.

The French First Army was practically stationary, the XV, XXXVI and XXXI Corps next to the British, completely so, after an attempt to advance on the 20th was stopped by barrages. The progress of the XX and VIII corps was "insignificant".

[1] This projected strategic attack will be dealt with later. See Note III at end of Chapter XXXV. It need only be said here that General Pétain did not issue any orders on the subject until the 27th, and did not enter into the Generalissimo's scheme with any enthusiasm. (Mordacq ii, p. 318).

[2] For their action during 18th–19th October, see Note I at the end of Chapter XXI.

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In the Tenth Army the [illegible] Corps made a short advance on the 20th but there was 'no appreciable change in the front of 'the other three'. The 21st was a 'quiet day'. During the night of the 21st/22nd 'the enemy began to retire in the front 'of the [illegible] and [illegible] Corps and the left of the XXIV'; and on the 22nd he was followed up but the 'water-logged 'ground and intense machine-gun fire prevented much progress."

In the Fifth Army 'the period 20th to 25th October was marked 'only by small actions' [illegible] 'at a few places.

In the Argonne 'there was some desultory fighting, with attack and counter-attack between the V Corps of the French Fourth Army and the Germans. "To the east the American 'left wing remained stationary'.

The German account (Baldwin pp. [illegible]) is that the 20th was "mostly quiet owing to incessant rain". On the 21st and 22nd only small actions took place, but with heavy loss to the French and Americans. Reinforcements were not forthcoming, and the infantry of two divisions, the 113th and 238th, were reorganised into two, instead of three regiments, each of two instead of three battalions of two, instead of four companies—that is a division had only 8 instead of 36 companies: three artillery regiments had to be given up to the Armies facing the main Allied advance.

On the 21st Maréchal Foch felt constrained to issue a Note to Generals Pétain, Pershing and Mangin G.A.C. F.O.A. vii (n), Annex 329, directing them to co-operate to "outflank the wooded "massif of the Argonne by wider turning movements, and cease "using up their forces in costly wood fighting unlikely to bring "about any result", and he indicated the proper direction for the attacks.

[illegible] Sketch 21.

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CHAPTER XXIII

Battle of the Selle (*continued*)

Second Phase

The Fourth, Third and First Armies

The Advance to the Sambre Canal, Le Quesnoy and Valenciennes

23rd October, 1918

(Sketches 27, 28, 29)

On the 23rd October the combined offensive of the Fourth, Third and First Armies was carried out. It had been postponed, first to the 21st, then to the 22nd, and again to the 23rd, on account of the slow arrival of the ammunition trains in the Third Army area.[1] Its purpose was to swing the left forward so that the Armies should stand opposite or beyond Hermann Position II, which was marked by the north–south course of the Sambre canal to beyond Ors, and then ran northward by Malgarni, between Bousies and Robersart (Fourth Army area), by Poix du Nord, Ghissignies and Ruesnes (Third Army area) to Querenaing and to the Schelde at Trith (First Army area).[2] The Germans had not wasted the time granted to them, and, although the trenches of the position were poor, it had two lines of double-apron wire, the hedges were wired, it was covered by an outpost zone, and where no defensible localities existed, strongpoints had been dug in the fields and orchards.

The G.H.Q. Summary of Information issued on this day stated that, owing to the disbandment of two divisions and the arrival in reserve from Russia of the *91st Division*, the number of enemy divisions on the Western Front was 194 (the maximum had been 204). Of these, 182 were German infantry, 4 German dismounted cavalry and 8 Austrian infantry. Excluding 31 divisions withdrawn after suffering severe casualties during the previous fortnight, 11 German divisions, none of which were fresh, and 6 Austrian were in

[1] See Sketch 29.

[2] The exact site of Hermann II cannot be found in the records

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reserve—on the 21st March there had been 80 divisions in reserve. Since the beginning of the year, 231 German infantry battalions had been disbanded—150 British.

The Fourth Army

At a conference with his corps commanders on the 19th, at the close of the first phase of the battle,[1] General Rawlinson had explained the outline of the next operation. The role of the Fourth Army, reduced to two corps by the American II Corps being drawn into G.H.Q. reserve, was now, he said, to establish a defensive flank facing east to protect the main operation of the Third and First Armies :

> the IX Corps (Lieut.-General Sir W. Braithwaite) was to advance to the Sambre canal, about two miles distant, capturing Catillon, Ors and the southern part of l'Evêque Wood ;
>
> the XIII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir T. Morland), in conjunction with the V Corps (Lieut.-General C. D. Shute), of the Third Army—the timed meeting places of the inner flanks of the two corps were fixed on a map—was simultaneously to secure the Landrecies–Englefontaine road, about five miles distant, on the western side of the Forest of Mormal (down which General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's corps had marched in 1914 on the eve of the Battle of Le Cateau), taking Pommereuil, the northern part of l'Evêque Wood, Fontaine au Bois, Bousies and Robersart.

An essential object of the operation was, he continued, to obtain artillery positions from which the railway junction of Aulnoye (eight miles east of Englefontaine, on the eastern side of the Forest of Mormal) could be kept under 6-inch gun fire, and he laid special stress on the employment of as many engineers and pioneers as possible to repair the broken bridges and clear away obstacles and landmines, as the Germans had spent much time in the preparation of such hindrances to a rapid advance. No organized preliminary bombardment was to be fired, but the usual counter-battery and harassing fire was to be maintained : the creeping barrage, available up to the second objective, would fall at Zero for

[1] See p. 325.

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four minutes two hundred yards ahead before moving forward :[1] to cover the advance from the second objective, divisions should send up some field artillery brigades : the IX and XIII Corps would make their own artillery arrangements for dealing with l'Evêque Wood.[2]

General Debeney promised General Rawlinson that the French First Army should co-operate, and was reminded by General Fayolle (G.A.R.) of Maréchal Foch's orders to him— " support the attack of the British Armies " ; but it was soon evident to the troops of the Fourth Army which were in the line that no help was intended. Actually, the French First Army " consecrated " the 23rd to preparations for attack on the 24th, and on that day only its right the XX and VIII Corps and the right of the XXXI advanced ; the two corps next to the British did not move.[3]

The country east of the Selle was unlike the open rolling downlands west of it, which were devoid of cover except for an occasional village and small wood ; the slopes were more abrupt, small streams ran in the valleys, the deep troughs of the two called Rivière Richemont and Rivière St. Maurice, shallow brooks with gravelly bottoms, lay close ahead of the front line, and there were large areas of woodland. Between the woods was pasture-land, cut into innumerable small enclosures by high, thick hedges. Three-quarters of l'Evêque Wood had been denuded of standing timber, and the cleared spaces were covered with undergrowth and brambles ; but otherwise did not present a serious obstacle to passage. Catillon and Bousies, the one an old compact townlet, the other a huge village scattered over about a square mile and surrounded and intersected by orchards and thick hedges, contained buildings of considerable strength ; the small villages were ill-built and straggling, and of little defensive value.

The enemy had no continuous trench system, but occupied a series of localities and natural features organized in great depth, and in several places, notably outside Pommereuil and Bousies, there were groups of practice trenches of which he made use.

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[1] The front part of the barrage, fired by 6-inch howitzers and 60-pdrs., was not to be distributed evenly over the whole front of attack, but disposed to deal with sunken roads, farms, strongpoints, etc.

[2] Whilst the general barrage moved at a hundred yards in four minutes, that through the wood was slowed to six minutes.

[3] F.O.A. vii (ii), pp. 189–91.

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wooded area and continued until daylight. That so much was accomplished must be attributed to the good leading of a few officers and N.C.Os.

The 1st Division met with very little resistance, the German outposts running back, so that only eleven prisoners were taken, and the 3rd and 2nd Brigades (Br.-Generals E. G. St. Aubyn and G. C. Kelly) reached the first, their final, objective early. From 5.30 to 5.45 a.m. the artillery put down a protective barrage beyond the objective and on the exits of Catillon, and when fire ceased patrols were sent forward to reconnoitre the town and the canal. One patrol of the 2/R. Sussex succeeded in entering Catillon, and others reached the canal; but as a second patrol of the Sussex was fired on from the houses and there was no intention of occupying the town, it was merely kept under observation by outposts pushed forward three to four hundred yards in front of the first objective.

The 6th Division had the assistance of three sections (of three machines each) of the American 301st Tank Battalion, one moving along the boundary with the 1st Division; but, in spite of this, the 18th and 71st Brigades (Br.-Generals G. S. Craufurd and P. W. Brown) had great difficulty in negotiating the thick hedges, and as the troops advanced the German artillery managed to catch the leading companies by shortening the barrage range and resting it at three places. Progress, therefore, was slow and the lines broke up into small parties which came under machine-gun fire as soon as they topped the crest on the eastern side of the St. Maurice valley, where they found the hedges wired, and owing to the consequent slow progress lost the protection of the barrage. The right of the 18th Brigade reached the first objective soon after 7 a.m., whilst the left was still near le Plantin, seven hundred yards short of it; but with the help of a tank it also arrived at the first objective. The other tanks with the division had difficulty in keeping touch of the infantry, and worked behind it; one was ditched, but between them they cleared all the ground from the starting-line to the first objective, and not one was put out of action by the Germans.

The 71st Brigade, with l'Evêque Wood, three-quarters of a mile in front of it, was soon in difficulties, and about 7 a.m. was still held up four hundred yards from the starting line. Not until 11 a.m. was the left, the 1/Leicestershire, on the

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first objective, just inside the wood, with the 9/Norfolk not yet abreast. Towards 1 p.m. the resistance weakened perceptibly, and about that hour the 2/Sherwood Foresters was sent up to continue the attack of the Norfolk, whilst the latter battalion was reorganized and sent through the 25th Division area to the Bazuel–Malgarni road to work south-eastwards through l'Evêque Wood. Before this operation could be completed darkness came on, so that the position of the 6th Division for the night lay between the first and second objectives. The casualties, including the gassed, amounted to a little over three hundred, but 4 enemy officers and 96 other ranks had been captured, with two field guns and 40 machine guns.

The attack of the 25th Division was to be made in three stages: first the 7th Brigade (Br.-General C. J. Hickie), with the 8/R. Warwickshire of the 75th Brigade attached (because the brigade was weak, its rifle strength being under seven hundred) was to take the first objective; then the two remaining battalions of the 75th Brigade (Br.-General C. W. Frizell) would come up on the left, the 1/8th Worcestershire to establish posts along the northern edge of l'Evêque Wood to protect the left flank, whilst the 1/5th Gloucestershire mopped up the north-eastern sector of the wood and proceeded to the second objective and the small part of the third objective in the divisional sector. Finally, the 74th Brigade (Br.-General H. M. Craigie-Halkett) would take the fourth and fifth objectives. This last part of the programme was not completed.

Eight tanks of the 10th Battalion were allotted to the 25th Division; of these, three developed mechanical trouble before operations began, and three were ditched in the fog near the Richemont stream.

The 7th Brigade started with all three battalions in line, and with the 8/R. Warwickshire (75th Brigade) behind the centre. The 21/Manchester (formed in two companies) pushed on well until held up by much wire and machine-gun fire in front of the sunken Bazuel–Pommereuil road. The one tank available moved up the road and did great execution amongst the enemy. About 5 a.m. the 21/Manchester was reported on the first objective; actually it was two hundred yards short of it, but this mistake was remedied as the light improved. The 9/Devonshire and 20/Manchester waded the Richemont whilst waiting for the bridges, and the leading

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troops started punctually with the artillery barrage, so that when it lifted in the dark, it nearly mistook them for the enemy. With its help, by 6 a.m., they captured the southern part of the village and seventy prisoners, while as will be seen the 1 5th Worcestershire (75th Brigade) took the northern part. Some parties of the Devonshire reached the first objective. To the rear, the fight was not over for while isolated posts in the Richemont valley offered a stubborn resistance particularly the detachments in farms No. 1 and farm No. 2, the latter not being taken until 8.4 a.m. Before this time, however, all the others had surrendered. News that the onward flow of the rear-ward lines had been set going again and all was proceeding well did not reach brigade headquarters until 9 a.m., and not until then did Brigadier-General Hickie order the 8/R. Warwickshire to go forward through the first objective to the Forester's House–Flaquet Brifaut road, which ran across l'Evêque valley half-way to the second objective. The battalion encountered severe opposition, but eventually reached the road.

The 7th Brigade (less the 8/R. Warwickshire) went forward on the left of the 7th Brigade about an hour after zero, and the 1 5th Worcestershire for nearly four hours was engaged in dealing with enemy machine-gun posts until it had reached the Forester's House–Flaquet Brifaut road. In attempting to get into position to clear the northern edge of the wood up to the north-eastern boundary, the battalion again encountered stiff opposition. After several hours' fighting and steady advance the purpose was nearly accomplished, it was decided to move in a south-easterly direction. This was accomplished without [illegible] hours 5 p.m. and then formed a line [illegible] edge of the wood. [illegible] was not much beyond [illegible] eastwards along the [illegible] of the 7th Brigade.

The other battalion of the 7th [illegible] advanced in three [illegible] machine-gun posts sent [illegible] Pommereuil. The [illegible] machine-gun [illegible] was [illegible]

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village until the barrage lifted at 4.20 a.m., when they advanced to piquet the north edge of l'Evêque Wood. They captured Tilleuls Farm and three 4·2-inch howitzers nearby, and then discovered a large party of the enemy retreating along the valley on the northern side of the wood, and opened fire; whereupon the whole party surrendered, bringing the total taken by the 1/8th Worcestershire to 15 officers and 371 other ranks, at a cost in the whole operation of 4 killed and 43 wounded.

The 74th Brigade waited until the situation became clear, first at le Cateau railway station and then in the valley of the Richemont, which it was not to cross before 6 a.m. It is significant of the slowness of the movement on a battle-field that it was not until 10.30 a.m. that the brigade reached Pommereuil, 11.15 a.m. before all three battalions were advancing along the northern edge of l'Evêque Wood to deploy along the Forester's House–Flaquet Brifaut road, and 4 p.m. before the centre and left were in position on the second objective and its continuation into the third, the right being delayed when short of it by sniping and machine-gun fire. There orders from Major-General Charles, who had come to the brigade headquarters, reached the battalions to the effect that, as the right could not be formed up on the second objective before dark, further operations of the 25th Division were postponed until next day.

The 18th Division attacked with the 53rd and 54th Brigades (Br.-Generals M. G. H. Barker and O. C. Borrett), which, each assisted by four tanks, were to capture the first and second objectives, the 55th (Br.-General E. A. Wood) going through to take the other three. The ground in front fell gently for a thousand yards to the Richemont stream, and then rose more steeply to a plateau, cut into by the valley of the unnamed stream which starts from a small lake near Flaquet Brifaut. The enemy held a strong position, not only in front in posts but also in practice trenches on the plateau; the crossings too of the Richemont were flanked by trench mortars and machine-gun fire in Evillers Wood and le Corbeau farms.

Owing to the difficulty experienced in finding battery positions, only half the front of the 53rd Brigade could be covered by an 18-pdr. barrage, although the 4·5-inch howitzer barrage farther ahead could be fired. To give time for the crossing of the Richemont the barrage, after travelling up-hill

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beyond the stream, was swung to the right, the pivot remaining stationary for thirty-two minutes whilst the left crept forward at the slow rate of a hundred yards in ten minutes.

The 7/R. West Kent, on the right, made excellent progress, the two remaining tanks (the others had been disabled by gas and a direct hit) doing good service against the enemy posts on the right until put out of action. The battalion captured about four hundred prisoners and was by 5 a.m., with only slight losses, on the first objective. The 10/Essex met with very determined resistance both in the valley and on the spur in the angle between the Richemont and the unnamed stream, and then from the neighbourhood of the first objective. The 8/R. Berkshire, the reserve, came up; but no further progress could be made until the enemy in front of the 53rd Brigade was outflanked by the advance of the 54th on the left; the Berkshire then attacked again and passed over the first objective to the second, which was gained about 8.30 a.m.

The 54th Brigade got well away, and with two tanks (of the others, one had broken down and one was disabled), turned the enemy out of three sunken roads and, in spite of some confusion, continued the advance, the 2/Bedfordshire, which led, stopping at a wood within half a mile of the first objective, which it mistook for its destination. The 11/Royal Fusiliers then went through, suffering some casualties, but taking many prisoners. The left dealt with the Germans in some orchards in the outskirts of Forest; the right, with the help of a tank and the reserve company, captured two field guns firing at point-blank range, and then, in spite of flanking fire from Epinette Farm, the company and the tank went on, took five more guns and arrived within two hundred yards of the second objective. Finding itself isolated, the company fell back to the battalion, half-way between the first and second objectives. Then the 55th Brigade, with six tanks, which had followed closely, passed through; it was not seriously engaged until it reached the second objective. This resistance was overcome, and by 7.20 a.m. the 8/East Surrey had taken le Fayt Farm, and the 7/Buffs Epinette Farm, both outliers of the defences of Misies (in the third objective). The artillery protective barrage had been lifted off the second objective at 6.40 a.m., and in spite of all efforts, the 55th Brigade was forty minutes

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late in arriving there, and the capture of the labyrinth of the wide-spreading village of Bousies presented a special problem. Yet with the help of the six tanks (one was put out of action) and one tank from the 7th Brigade, houses and orchards were mopped up one by one, and by 3 p.m. the 8/East Surrey had gained a line on the eastern side of the village, only a few minutes after the 7/Buffs, with the help of a tank, was on the north-eastern edge. But it was 8 p.m. before Bousies could be reported finally cleared. As the 33rd Division of the Third Army on the left was short of the fourth objective, after consultation with Br.-General Wood at 4 p.m., the continuation of the attack to the fourth and fifth objectives by the remaining battalions of the 54th and 55th Brigades was postponed by Lieut.-Colonel G. Blewitt, the G.S.O. 1 of the division, who was at the front, until next day, and this decision was approved by Major-General Lee.

The results of the day were considered extremely satisfactory, as the final objectives had been very nearly secured at no great cost, except of tanks ; for only nine rallied of the 23 engaged.

THE THIRD ARMY[1]

The Third Army, after its success on the 20th, stood on approximately a north-south line, but the general direction of its offensive was to be north-east, so that in order to reach the final objective the right wing of the Army had much farther to advance than the left. The V Corps had to go 9,500 yards and had a succession of five objectives, whilst the right of the XVII had under a mile to cover, and its left had actually reached the final objective on the 20th, and thus formed the pivot of a great wheel to the left.

The ground in front presented no special difficulties : it consisted of a series of long, low ridges with the valleys of small streams between them descending to the Schelde ; it was closely cultivated, and dotted with small villages, nearly all in the valleys, surrounded as usual by orchards.

The distribution of artillery to the corps was the same as on the 20th, but the amount of ammunition was

[1] See Sketch 27.

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restricted,[1] because of the difficulties of bringing it up, and to compensate for this at least two mobile 6-inch trench mortars were to accompany each infantry brigade—some had as many as six—to deal with machine-gun nests and strongpoints. The number of tanks was small, although the country was well suited for their use; six of the 11th Battalion were allotted to the V Corps, four to the IV and a company (nominally 12 tanks) each to the VI and XVII Corps; but these last were to be held in reserve.

Zero hour was made 2 a.m., as the right of the Third Army was a thousand yards ahead of the starting line of the left of the Fourth Army, which was to advance at 1.20 a.m. The ground mist seems to have been thinner than in the Fourth Army area.

The V Corps (Lieut.-General C. D. Shute) had five objectives, the fifth being just beyond the line of Hermann Position II (running northwards from Englefontaine), which in the other corps sectors fell short of it. The number of British and German divisions in front line seems to have been the same. The barrage was timed to reach the first objective at 3 a.m. and leave it at 3.52 a.m., the second at 5.4 a.m. and pause there until 7.8 a.m., reaching the third at 7.40 a.m. Beyond the third there would be no barrage.

The 33rd and 21st Divisions (Major-Generals Sir R. J. Pinney and D. G. M. Campbell) made the attack, each with three tanks, which were to be employed in mopping up Forest, Croix and Ovillers as soon as it was light enough. Enemy shelling, which, as with the Fourth Army, had been fairly lively during the early part of the night, was further provoked by the 1.20 a.m. attack of the Fourth Army, so that casualties in the battalions as they assembled were considerable.

The 98th and 19th Brigades (Br.-Generals J. D. Heriot-Maitland and C. R. G. Mayne) of the 33rd Division, relieved the 38th Division during the evening of the 22nd, and were to take the first four objectives. The enemy held a line of organized rifle pits supported by machine guns, the main

[1]

	Rounds per gun	
	23rd Oct.	24th Oct.
18-pdr.	350	250
4·5-inch howitzer	300	250
6-inch howitzer	100	60
60-pdr.	100	80

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opposition coming from the right. The 1/Middlesex and 5/Scottish Rifles, with one tank,[1] which led the attacks of their brigades, overcame all resistance and reached the first objective about 3.30 a.m., the former battalion clearing Forest and taking two hundred prisoners there.[2]

When the barrage lifted at 3.52 a.m. for the next bound, the 4/King's (98th) and the 5/Scottish Rifles continued the attack and reached the second objective by 7 a.m., the main opposition coming from an abattoir half-way between Vert Baudert and Ovillers. The bound to the third objective was carried out by the 4/King's, and the 1/Queen's and 1/Cameronians (19th), both the latter being very weak; the 4/King's met with much opposition and two companies of the 1/Middlesex were sent up to turn the enemy's left, but before this could be effected the King's had taken the third objective, on the western bank of the Harpies, where the two battalions of the 19th Brigade had arrived as early as 10.15 a.m. The 2/Argyll and 1/Cameronians now took up the lead, each supported by a battery of 18-pdrs., a section of 4·5-inch howitzers, and the 6-inch trench mortars of a division (33rd and 38th). The Argyll made good progress to a line just short of the fourth objective, where they were held up till 5 p.m., when it grew dark, by fire from an enemy position about a hundred yards behind Ferme Paul Jacques, which lies on the top of a ridge. The Highlanders then dribbled forward, enveloped and took the farm, and established an outpost line through it. The Cameronians had reached the farm ridge by 4 p.m., coming, when they topped it, under machine-gun fire from Wagnonville and Poix du Nord (in Hermann Position II). Owing to the orchards and hedges it was difficult to locate the guns, and a line which afforded cover was occupied a few hundred yards short of the fourth objective. By this time it was too dark for the 100th Brigade to go through against the fourth objective, and its attack was postponed until early morning.

[1] Of the other two with the 33rd Division, one was hit and the second had mechanical trouble before crossing the starting line. The one which went into action got as far as the first objective, but there developed serious mechanical trouble.

[2] Of the *8th Division*. Crown Prince Rupprecht (ii, p. 465), however, mentions that many men of the *25th* and *30th Divisions*, in Forest, threw away their arms that they might run from the field more quickly. Both these divisions were rated as first-class; they were withdrawn on the 27th/28th. The actual disposition of the divisions, according to regimental histories, was *8th Division*, Pommereuil to Forest; the *30th* thence to Ovillers; the *25th* thence to Beaurain.

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All went well with the attack of the 64th and 110th Brigades (Br.-Generals C. V. Edwards and H. R. Cumming) of the 21st Division, although they encountered considerable opposition from Ovillers and Bois le Duc, and the former arrived at the third objective by 9 a.m. and the latter, at 9.45 a.m. Two of the three attached tanks of the 11th Battalion reached the second objective, destroying machine-gun nests and helping to mop up Ovillers; one of these afterwards fell into a gravel pit and the other broke a track; the third tank lost direction in the dark and strayed into the 33rd Division area.

At 10.30 a.m. the 62nd Brigade (Br.-General G. H. Gater) passed through the third objective, without tanks to assist it, but under a barrage fired by the XCIV Brigade R.F.A.; it cleared Vendegie au Bois and the orchards beyond and arrived on the fourth objective by 2.15 p.m. Attempts to advance farther, however, were frustrated by machine-gun fire from the Poix du Nord ridge and the 21st Division had to be content with the capture of the fourth objective; but the total advance of the V Corps had been three and a half miles.

The IV Corps also had five objectives, but the second concerned only the right of the corps, for it ran into the third on the east side of Beaurain. As the distance between the fourth and fifth objectives was nearly two miles, an intermediate objective was interpolated. Having less total distance to advance than the V Corps on its right, zero hour was made 3.20 a.m. instead of 2 a.m., and the two corps would not move forward together until they left the third objective at 8.40 a.m. The advance from the fourth objective was to begin at 12.12 p.m. Orders were given in this corps to fire only smoke and shrapnel on the villages in order to spare the French inhabitants, and for the 6-inch trench mortars to fire a hurricane bombardment at Zero, before being taken forward with the troops.

The 5th and 42nd Divisions (Major-Generals J. Ponsonby and A. Solly Flood) were to capture the first three objectives, and then, assembled under a smoke barrage, the 37th and New Zealand Divisions (Major-Generals H. Bruce Williams and Sir A. Russell) were to pass through. Each of the leading divisions sent forward one brigade, the 15th and the 125th (Br.-Generals R. D. F. Oldman and H. Fargus),

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and each brigade employed two battalions in front line, which in spite of the smoke barrage suffered very considerably during assembly from the enemy's shelling. The former brigade was preceded by two tanks (out of four allotted), which materially assisted in the attack on Beaurain, but then developed mechanical trouble.[1] The Beaurain ridge was here the enemy's principal defensive position, and the village was the main feature of the defence, well flanked from Ovillers until that place was taken by the V Corps. Beaurain made a stout resistance and there was hard fighting in the early stages of the attack, men on both sides being killed by the bayonet. The left of the 125th Brigade reached the third objective (actually its second) as early as 4.45 a.m., but the rest of the line did not do so until close upon 8 a.m., the right forming a defensive flank on the small piece of the second objective in the corps area until the V Corps came up.[2]

To continue the attack the 37th and New Zealand Divisions detailed the 111th (plus a battalion of the 112th) and 2nd New Zealand Brigades (Br.-Generals S. G. Francis and R. Young).

Owing to the obstinate defence of Beaurain, Major-General Bruce Williams decided at 8 a.m.—when there was just time to stop the barrage which was to be fired by the same guns which had fired for the 5th Division—to postpone the advance of the 37th Division from the third objective from 8.40 to 10 a.m. When it then took place, the opposition came chiefly from machine guns, and it was overcome with the aid of the 6-inch trench mortars, so that the whole of the fourth objective of the 37th Division was taken by 12.45 p.m.

The 2nd New Zealand Brigade went forward to time at 8.40 a.m. under a barrage fired by four of the five field brigades which had fired the original barrage, and it was very effective. Vertigneul did not offer much resistance, and the fourth objective was secured by 10.15 a.m. The two support battalions then passed through the two leaders and

[1] The 125th Brigade war diary speaks of the attack on the Beaurain ridge being supported by two tanks which came up from the left, but the war diaries of the I Tank Brigade and the 12th Tank Battalion agree that no tanks were available for the 42nd Division. The VI Corps, on the left, had a company of tanks put to reserve, but not employed; so the two mentioned must have been those with the 15th Brigade.

[2] The casualties of the 5th Division were about 500; of the 42nd, about 400. The former took 261 prisoners; the latter, 325 prisoners, mainly of the *25th* and *4th Divisions*.

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crossed the St. Georges stream. Beyond it was a line of machine-gun posts strongly wired; but after the 2/Otago had crept up and broken in at one point the rest of the line surrendered. Fire came from the right, where the 37th Division was not yet up, and this was also overcome, and the fifth and final objective reached by 2.45 p.m. In the evening a company of the 1/Canterbury pushed forward into Beaudignies, and established bridgeheads across the Ecaillon on the le Quesnoy and Ruesnes roads without opposition.

The 111th Brigade (37th Division) did not leave the fourth objective until 5.15 p.m., as the V Corps on the right had failed to penetrate farther. The 10/Royal Fusiliers and the 1/Essex (112th), being without a barrage, were soon brought to a stop by fire from the right; so the Fusiliers formed a right defensive flank parallel to the railway from which most of the fire was coming. Later, however, the Essex were able to take Neuville and Salesches and gain both the intermediate and fifth objectives, coming abreast of the 2nd New Zealand Brigade at 2.30 a.m. (24th). Meantime, a flanking attack up the railway at 1.45 a.m. by the Fusiliers and the 13/K.R.R.C., under a barrage on the railway, had failed to go very far. As the 112th Brigade was due to pass through the 111th at 4 a.m., in order to give it a definite straight line from which to start in the dark, Br.-General Francis ordered the Fusiliers to advance a little and the Essex to fall back to the intermediate line, and this was accomplished just in time.

The VI Corps had only three of the objectives ahead of it, the third, fourth and fifth, entailing a total advance of about three miles, and it was accomplished with complete success. Zero hour was 3.20 a.m., the same as in the IV Corps, but a halt was to be made on the third objective until 8.40 a.m. Although this might involve a long wait there, Lieut.-General Haldane judged that it was best to take advantage of the night for the passage of the Harpies stream and the capture of the villages of Romeries and Vertain.

In spite of enemy shelling whilst they were marching up and deploying, the 3rd and 2nd Divisions (Major-Generals C. J. Deverell and C. E. Pereira) passed, up to time, through the troops of the 62nd and Guards Divisions, which were in the line and had been earlier thinned out to an outpost line. Each division now had the support of five brigades of field

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artillery, one having been transferred from the right to the left division ; but otherwise the artillery arrangements were the same as on the 20th.

The 1/Gordon Highlanders and 2/Royal Scots of the 76th and 8th Brigades (Br.-Generals F. E. Metcalfe and B. D. Fisher) of the 3rd Division led the advance. The enemy was surprised, and they duly crossed the Harpies by wading and swimming, carried Romeries and reached the third objective. Only the left of the Gordons met with stiff resistance from machine guns in the houses of Romeries, which was overcome with the help of light trench mortars. At the third objective—where very few casualties were suffered during the halt—the 2/Suffolk and the 8/King's Own of the 76th Brigade and the 1/Royal Scots of the 8th passed through, and three brigades of field artillery came up to cover the further advance. The two former battalions had had to make detours to avoid Romeries, which the enemy was now shelling. His infantry and machine-gunners, however, appeared to be demoralized and offered very little opposition except in Escarmain, which the Royal Scots, however, took with less than fifty casualties. All three battalions reached the fourth objective, in spite of fire from the next ridge beyond the St. Georges stream ; they crossed that stream and went on to an intermediate objective, capturing several field guns. Thence at 2.30 p.m. the 7/Shropshire L.I., taking the place of the Royal Scots, advanced against slight opposition to the fifth objective.

At 11.15 a.m., when all was going well, Major-General Deverell had sent instructions that the Oxfordshire Hussars (with a company of the VI Corps Cyclist Battalion attached), a brigade of field artillery and the attached machine-gun company, should pass through to the fifth objective, make good the Ecaillon river and the ridge beyond, also Ruesnes and the railway beyond, and ascertain if Beaudignies and Bermerain, on the river, were occupied. This attempt to exploit the advantage gained had no success. Both cavalry and, later, infantry patrols found the line of the Ecaillon, here just fordable, held by the enemy, and were unable to force a crossing. The fifth objective, therefore, remained the high-water mark of the advance of the 3rd Division, and the 9th Brigade (Br.-General H. C. Potter), which by divisional orders had followed closely, in case it should be required, relieved the 76th and 8th Brigades on that line.

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In the 2nd Division, the 5th Brigade (under Lieut.-Colonel R. H. Pipon) sent forward the 24/Royal Fusiliers and the 2/Highland L.I. Here also the enemy was surprised. Vertain was taken by the Fusiliers with two hundred and fifty prisoners, and the Highland L.I., after the capture of a farm by throwing in bombs and cutting a wire entanglement by hand under cover of Lewis gun fire, brought in three hundred more. Both battalions reached the third objective by 5.30 a.m. During the halt the 2/Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire L.I. took the place of the 24/Royal Fusiliers, and, with the Highland L.I., after some opposition from Escarmain, where the 3rd Division was engaged, reached the fourth objective about 11 a.m., the former battalion continuing on to the intermediate objective a short distance ahead, which did not extend to the Highland L.I. sector. Both battalions advanced again at 2.30 p.m., without much trouble, to the fifth objective. The Oxfordshire pushed on to Capelle, which they captured with many prisoners, and the Highland L.I. came up on the left ; but attempts of patrols to cross the Ecaillon half a mile beyond, were met by heavy fire. The final objective had, however, been secured, and the 5th Brigade was relieved by the 99th. The VI Corps had thus secured all its objectives and a little more.

The 19th Division (Major-General G. D. Jeffreys) held the whole front of the XVII Corps, as the left was already on the final objective. It had to do no more than make a short left wheel, but this involved crossing the Harpies stream. During the night the 82nd Field Company R.E. succeeded in laying four footbridges, and at zero hour, 3.20 a.m., the same as that of the IV and VI Corps, a barrage was dropped two hundred yards beyond the stream for 23 minutes, during which time the 8/Gloucestershire and 10/R. Warwickshire of the 57th Brigade were to cross and form on the eastern bank. Actually the front wave was over before Zero. Except for some resistance from machine guns in a copse and a pocket of the enemy in a sandpit which had been overlooked in the moonlight, the advance was easy, and the final objective was occupied by 4.30 a.m. Subsequently, an advance was made in co-operation with the VI Corps to the Capelle–St. Martin road, and the 58th Brigade (Br.-General A. E. Glasgow) extended this line towards

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Vendegies. Here also patrols were unable to cross the Ecaillon on account of strong opposition. The casualties of the 19th Division in the period 20th–23rd October had been 739, and it had taken 351 prisoners.

The enemy resistance to the advance of the Third Army had been more successful on the right than on the left; for though it was fairly easy to go two miles in the strong moonlight under a good barrage, beyond this in daylight, under a much lighter improvised barrage, progress was more difficult, and the right had farther to go—nearly six miles—than the left. Unfortunately on the 23rd, though the weather improved, the Royal Air Force could not render much assistance; but there was more activity, with more combats than there had been for many weeks; Aulnoye and Hirson (30 miles south-east of Le Cateau) railway junctions were attacked, and in a fight over the former, five German aircraft were destroyed without any British loss.

THE FIRST ARMY[1]

In the First Army, the XXII Corps, like the left of the Third Army, was on the 23rd to stand fast on the Ecaillon, with a view to an advance next day; the Canadian Corps was to keep touch with the enemy, establish posts on the eastern bank of the Schelde if opportunity occurred, but the main bodies were not to cross the river without reference to corps headquarters; the VIII Corps was to cross the Scarpe so as to come into line on the Schelde.

In the 4th Canadian Division (Major-General Sir D. Watson), the 12th Brigade (Br.-General J. H. MacBrien) pushed forward during the morning through the western suburbs of Valenciennes against some opposition. The 78th Battalion, on the left, after street fighting, established a line along the Faubourg de Paris–Bruay road, and during the night reached the Schelde canal. At 8 p.m. a company of the 85th Battalion attacked under a barrage, and gained possession of the St. Leger–St. Waast road east of the Faubourg de Paris, with its right on the canal. The 11th Canadian Brigade which had the canal on its immediate front, made no advance; but its patrols which crossed the canal during the night found the eastern bank held.

[1] See Sketch 28.

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In the 3rd Canadian Division the 9th and 7th Brigades continued their advance in the early morning, and against slight opposition reached the Schelde in the sector Thiers–Escaupont–Fresnes, whence the line was bent back north-westwards to connect with that of the VIII Corps south-east of Odomez.

The right and centre of the VIII Corps crossed the Scarpe, in spite of machine-gun opposition. The 8th Division (Major-General W. C. G. Heneker) pushed on against very slight resistance through the northern part of the Forest of Raismes, and got in touch with the Canadian Corps. The 6/R. West Kent (37th Brigade) of the 12th Division succeeded in crossing the Scarpe east of Nivelle in the early morning; the construction of a bridge by the 87th Field Company R.E. was, however, hampered by machine-gun fire, and it was not completed until next day. The 6/Buffs, the right of the 37th Brigade, crossed the canalized Scarpe about 1 p.m. against some opposition, and took Haute Rive. Fire from the enemy's position near Fort de Maulde hampered the movements of the 36th Brigade, but the 9/Royal Fusiliers, on the right, succeeded in working forward and occupying Thun, Flagnies and le Manoir, only a little short of the Scarpe.

The First Army had therefore reached, and in places gone beyond, the position required, the Third Army had very nearly reached it, and the Fourth Army had made good progress.

NOTE I

The French and Americans on 23rd October

(Sketch 26)

Very little happened on the right of the British. It has already been pointed out that the French First Army, next to them, remained passive during the 23rd; the Tenth Army endeavoured to advance, but "only the XVIII Corps succeeded in pushing "some small forces (éléments) across the Souche"; all other attacks failed. The Fifth Army was engaged only in some small

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actions (actions de détail); the Fourth Army remained stationary and repelled German attacks[1];" the left wing of the American " forces [that is the First Army west of the Meuse] was still " stationary "; the detailed map shows no advance west of the Meuse between the 18th October and 1st November, and none east of the Meuse between the 9th October and the 5th November. The German account (Gallwitz, p. 431), does not mention any attack, but records the repulse by the Argonne Group of a strong American attack.

NOTE II

The Germans on 23rd October

Little is to be found in German histories about the fighting on the 23rd, but the following appears in Schwarte (iii, p. 579):

" On this day the British attacked north and south of " Solesmes with strong forces, reckoned at 15 fresh or brought-up- " to-strength divisions. One diary remarks that it was the day " of heaviest fighting since the great defeat of the 8th August " with its direful results. On account of the dwindling strength " of the divisions, the *Second Army* headquarters [Army frontage " from 3 miles inside the French area to the Forest of Mormal " (inclusive)] drew the attention of Crown Prince Rupprecht's " Group of Armies, as well as of O.H.L., to the fact that the *Second* " *Army* had reached, near the Forest of Mormal, its last rearward " position, and that, in view of the general condition of the troops, " the defence of this great wooded area raised serious considera- " tions. The Army commander, therefore, recommended a " general retreat to the Antwerp–Meuse position at an early " date. . . . During the afternoon of the 24th the *Second Army* " received orders to continue to hold the present battle area, and " if forced to retire only to do so fighting step by step ".

According to regimental histories, the German artillery barrages during the night before Zero were due to false alarms of attack; when the British infantry did advance it got within twenty or thirty yards before fire was opened. Practically every regiment claims that the British broke in elsewhere and either turned its flanks or got in rear of it.

In a debate in the *Reichstag* it was held that Ludendorff's explanations were unsatisfactory and the suggestion was made that " the defeated commander-in-chief should offer his resignation and retire ". (Max, p. 50).

[1] See Sketch 21.

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CHAPTER XXIV

Battle of the Selle (*concluded*)

Second Phase (*concluded*)

The Fourth, Third and First Armies

24th October 1918

(Sketches 27, 28, 29)

On the 24th October the Fourth, Third and First Armies continued their operations to reach the final objective of the previous day where not attained, and to improve their positions. The night of the 23rd/24th passed quietly. There was no night flying and on the 24th German air activity slackened, although the day was fairly fine; many air attacks were made by the R.A.F. on enemy columns, but few results could be observed, owing to mist.

The Fourth Army [1]

The IX Corps had not far to go, so made 9.30 a.m. its zero hour in order to give the men a full night's rest. The 1st Division did no more than push patrols down to the western outskirts of Catillon and the Sambre canal, and the 18th Brigade of the 6th Division did likewise, to find that the Germans had evacuated the western side of the canal leaving only a few snipers and machine-gun posts. The 16th Brigade (Br.-General W. G. Braithwaite) relieved the 71st, but the latter left the 2/Sherwood Foresters to hold the existing front line facing north-east, whilst the 16th Brigade carried out its task of clearing the remaining portion of l'Eveque Wood. For this purpose two battalions, filing to the left, deployed along the XIII Corps defensive flank in the wood, so as to attack south-eastwards. An artillery traversing barrage was provided, whilst machine-guns barraged the south-eastern edge of the wood and kept the space between the wood and the canal under fire. The corps heavy guns engaged targets east of the canal. The artillery barrage, a hundred yards in six minutes in the wood,

[1] See Sketch 29.

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was, in view of the poor resistance, too slow. The wood was easily cleared; but it was found impossible to remain in the small eastern corner owing to concentrated machine-gun fire.

The XIII Corps, in order to reach the fourth and fifth objectives of the 23rd had to cross the Hermann Position II and its wire. A section of eight tanks of the 10th Tank Battalion was allotted to it, but of these only six appeared, and the 25th Division, in consequence, received no more than two. Zero hour was made 4 a.m. The barrage was to pause for one hour on the fourth objective.

The 25th Division employed the 74th Brigade in place of the 7th, and it successfully assembled along the eastern edge of l'Eveque Wood; but as soon as the troops emerged into the open in the moonlight they came under heavy fire from the Hermann Position II. This was smothered, the wire rushed and, after some hand-to-hand fighting, the fourth objective was secured by 10 a.m. At 2 p.m. the advance was resumed under a creeping barrage, and by 6 p.m., after a steady fire-fight, the final objective of the 25th Division was taken and consolidation begun. Both the tanks allotted to the division had mechanical trouble, one helped as far as the fourth objective, the other caught up there and went on to the fifth, but, breaking down a second time, was hit.

In the 18th Division, Major-General Lee interpolated an intermediate line between the fourth and fifth objectives, on which a halt of an hour was to be made. The 55th and 54th Brigades were employed. In the former the brigade commander decided to use only the 7/Queen's, which was fresh, as both the 7/Buffs and 8/East Surrey had been heavily engaged on the previous day. In the 54th Brigade, the 6/Northamptonshire was to go as far as the intermediate line, where the 2/Bedfordshire and 11/Royal Fusiliers would pass through. Thus the weight of the attack was not heavy, and as the barrage, fired by four brigades of field artillery, was not as good as usual, and the enemy's position, in orchards and behind hedges, strong, the fighting was heavy and progress slow. The 7/Queen's had a four-hours' tussle around Hermann Position II on the ridge between Bousies and Robersart, before, by 8.25 a.m., it reached the western edge of the latter village, where machine guns from the upper storeys of the houses added to the considerable casualties

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already suffered. Br.-General E. A. Wood[1] had decided that as soon as Robersart and Renuart Farm, to the west, had been taken the 8/East Surrey should relieve the Queen's ; but progress was very slow, and it was not until 6 p.m. that the church in the centre of the village was reached, after Renuart Farm had been occupied an hour earlier by the 54th Brigade. The East Surrey then took over the sector north of the Robersart–Preux au Bois road, and Robersart was cleared ; but attempts at 11 p.m., and again at dawn (25th), to reach the fifth objective, two or three hundred yards ahead, were both unsuccessful.

The 6/Northamptonshire, making the attack of the 54th Brigade, lost the barrage owing to slow progress in hedge country in the dark, and on receiving heavy fire from the German position fell back. Soon after 5 a.m. the two support battalions (2/Bedfordshire and the 11/Royal Fusiliers) which had closed up, passed through the Northamptonshire who soon after repulsed a German counter-attack against its right ; but they also were soon brought to a standstill, although a tank broke through the Germans and eased the situation by driving down the Renuart Farm–la Fourquette road behind them. Another counter-attack against the left was repulsed with fairly heavy losses to the enemy.

This being the situation at 9 a.m., the four field artillery brigades were directed to engage such machine guns as had been located, and the heavy batteries to shell the German positions east of the ridge on which Renuart Farm stands. Two 6-inch howitzer batteries and two 60-pdr. batteries were available west of Pommereuil. Being uncertain where the front line was and making use of an aeroplane photograph, they shelled the wire on the west side and unfortunately shot short, causing the 54th Brigade a number of casualties. Major-General Lee, at 11.30 a.m., visited brigade headquarters at Epinette Farm, bringing the news that the 33rd Division (Third Army), on the left, was pushing on, and at 12.30 p.m. it was learned for certain that this division was well ahead near Englefontaine. It was then arranged that three companies of the Northamptonshire should be extricated from the fight and sent to turn the enemy's position

[1] He went sick at 10 a.m. and was replaced until the end of hostilities by Lieut.-Colonel A. P. B. Irwin, 8/East Surrey. Br.-General O. C. Borrett, of the 54th Brigade, went sick at 1.30 p.m. (returning on 6th November), and was replaced temporarily by Lieut.-Colonel R. Turner, 6/Northamptonshire.

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from the north, whilst the other two battalions sent forward patrols, the four tanks which were now available assisting. Meanwhile, an officer, a sergeant and a Lewis gun section of the Northamptonshire had put out of action six machine guns north of Renuart Farm, capturing their crews;[1] so when, at 4.30 p.m. the turning movement had made its effect felt, Renuart Farm was captured and by 5 p.m. the 54th Brigade had established a line east of it, about three hundred yards short of the fifth objective, making touch on both flanks. One tank which remained in action until 10 p.m. near the farm did particularly useful work, blowing up a German dump and inflicting very heavy casualties. All four tanks rallied.

The Fourth Army had accomplished nearly all that had been asked of it and was in position facing east. During the 23rd–24th, with four divisions, it had defeated eight German divisions and a cyclist brigade, and captured 27 officers, 1,213 other ranks and 66 guns.

THE THIRD ARMY [2]

General Byng's orders for the 24th directed a further advance to a ridge of high ground, Englefontaine (inclusive)–north of Ghissignies–Ruesnes–Quérenaing (the First Army carrying on the line to the Schelde). There it was intended that the main bodies of the corps should entrench and rest until the rear communications were more satisfactory; the corps commanders were, however, warned that circumstances might demand that the advance should be resumed at short notice. Advanced guards of all arms were to be pushed forward towards Jolimetz–le Quesnoy–Villers Pol–Sepmeries: if the enemy retired these advanced guards were to maintain touch with him: if he stood fast they were to endeavour to push back his rear guards to within two or three miles of his main position; but if the opposition was strong, this action was not to be adopted until further orders. Zero hour was to be 4 a.m. as in the XIII Corps (Fourth Army).

The V Corps (Lieut.-General C. D. Shute) detailed the 33rd and 21st Divisions, with instructions that the former should provide a refused right flank to keep connection with

[1] Lieut. F. W. Hedges received the V.C.
[2] See Sketch 27.

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the Fourth Army, and that the advanced guards when they reached the Forest of Mormal should form a screen in it about a mile east of Englefontaine and thence to Louvignies and Jolimetz.

The 33rd Division sent forward the 98th and 19th Brigades, each with a field company R.E. attached. A special artillery programme was provided for the four field brigades in support.[1] Bursts of artillery and machine guns were to be fired at targets about five hundred yards ahead of the infantry, lifting at the rate of 500 yards in 15 minutes and firing for 5 minutes on each lift; during any pauses batteries were to fire at slow rate on targets immediately beyond the barrage line reached.

The 98th Brigade carried the wired position in front, but at the Hecq–Poix du Nord road was stopped by enfilade fire from the right, where the Fourth Army was not up. The 19th Brigade went farther and reached the road running northward through the western outskirts of Englefontaine. About midday the 100th Brigade (Br.-General A. W. F. Baird) came up according to plan, but failed to penetrate into Englefontaine. At night it took over the whole front of the 33rd Division.

The 64th and 62nd Brigades of the 21st Division had two objectives: the Englefontaine–Salesches road and the Englefontaine–Ghissignies road. Up to the first there was to be a regular barrage from its four brigades of field artillery and the machine guns. After this, only one of these brigades would support the attack, the others helping as they could; but no fire was to be directed on Poix du Nord, as it was full of French civilians—2,600 were found there. The 62nd Brigade reached the first objective by 6 a.m.; the 64th was held up by the wire of the Hermann Position for two hours, when one company of the 9/K.O.Y.L.I. found a gap, and resistance was then soon overcome, Poix du Nord was passed through and the first objective reached about 8 a.m.

Both brigades failed at first to reach the second objective; an attack under a barrage fired by all four brigades was therefore arranged for 4 p.m. This was entirely successful, and by 6 p.m. the second objective had been captured on the whole divisional front.

[1] See p. 335. The 33rd and 21st Divisions had the artillery allotted to the 38th and 17th Divisions as well as their own.

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The main position defined in Army orders had therefore been secured by the V. Corps, except that Englefontaine remained in the enemy's hands and the screen of outposts in the Forest of Mormal had not been established.

The result of the action of the IV Corps (Lieut.-General Sir M. Harper) was very much the same. The 37th and New Zealand Divisions (Major-Generals H. Bruce Williams and Sir A. Russell), which continued in the line with the same artillery support as on the 23rd,[1] each sent forward one brigade, the 112th and the 2nd New Zealand (Br.-Generals W. N. Herbert and R. Young). The line of the 37th Division was two thousand yards ahead of that of the V Corps on its right, and as much behind that of the New Zealand Division, but the 112th Brigade was to start at 4 a.m., in spite of its right flank being exposed, and to go straight to the final objective. Major-General Williams, therefore, had taken the precaution to have the enemy's machine guns on the right flank and on the railway on both sides of Salesches well shelled during the night. The 1/1st Hertfordshire and 13/Royal Fusiliers experienced much difficulty in reaching the forming-up line in time, as the 111th Brigade, through which they were to pass, had only just arrived there, and the night was dark, the roads were congested, and shelling was still going on. Strong resistance was offered at Salesches station, and wire had to be cut through before the enemy could be driven off. Then, although the Ecaillon, here easily fordable, was crossed, the hollow Louvignies–Beaudignies road secured and Ghissignies captured, heavy fire continued to come from the railway on the right, and a battalion of the 111th Brigade had to be sent up to watch that flank. Thus by 9.45 a.m. the brigade held the northern outskirts of Ghissignies and the high ground north of the village, and a right defensive flank had been formed. The situation remained the same for the rest of the day, although several unsuccessful attempts were made to gain the railway. Between 5 and 6 p.m. the 21st Division came up on the right and relieved the 37th of its long defensive flank, and at 9 p.m. the Hertfordshire made another attempt, after a 2-minute barrage, to secure the railway line near the Halte, but in vain.

[1] See p. 335.

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The 2nd New Zealand Brigade, being well ahead of its right-hand neighbour, waited until it drew abreast. About 7 a.m., when the 37th Division was seen entering Ghissignies, it went forward without an artillery barrage. It had originally been arranged that this should start from a line two hundred yards beyond the Salesches station–Beaudignies road, but when it was learnt, late at night (23rd/24th), that troops were beyond Beaudignies,[1] the barrage was cancelled and, as it happened, the 2/Canterbury on the left had to take cover from the 3rd Division barrage, which partly overlapped the New Zealand sector. The 1/Otago soon reached the Louvignies–Beaudignies road, and there the 2/Canterbury joined it. Although Béart Farm was found empty, both battalions were opposed by machine-gun fire and required the close support of two batteries to make any further progress. The Otago reached their objective, some woods beyond Béart Farm, by 4.30 p.m., and the Canterbury did so about an hour later. Besides making an advance of five miles, the IV Corps had, during the 23rd and 24th taken 633 prisoners, at the cost of just over four hundred casualties; but, like the V Corps, it had been unable to establish the forward outpost line.

The 3rd and 2nd Divisions of the VI Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Haldane) sent forward their 9th and 99th Brigades (Br.-Generals H. C. Potter and A. E. McNamara) at 4 a.m., with no fear for their right, as Beaudignies was held by the New Zealanders. The artillery support was the same as on the 23rd. The barrage came down on the line of the Ecaillon stream, and there halted 24 minutes to allow the infantry to close up to it; it then advanced 400 yards, and made a further pause of one hour to allow the infantry to cross. The stream was found deeper than expected—waist deep in places—but the crossing was not seriously opposed, although seven enemy field guns, south-west of Ruesnes, firing over open sights gave some trouble to the 9th Brigade, until fifteen Lewis guns were turned on them, and they were then captured. The left battalion (1/Northumberland Fusiliers) reached the objective by 8.30 a.m.; but in the dark the right battalion (4/Royal Fusiliers) at first mistook the Beaudignies–Ruesnes road for the le Quesnoy–Ruesnes road, subsequently suffering considerable losses in advancing to the objective

[1] See p. 366.

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without a barrage, and did not get there until 1 p.m. Patrols were sent out at dark, and found the enemy holding the line of a little stream three hundred yards ahead. One patrol of the 1/Northumberland Fusiliers got as far as Belle Vue Farm, and reported the railway nearby clear of the enemy.

The 99th Brigade found the Germans holding high ground nearly a mile beyond the Ecaillon, but much fire coming from la Folie on the left in the XVII Corps area. This farm was taken by the 1/R. Berkshire, and the advance then went on. Ruesnes was passed through by the 23/Royal Fusiliers, and both battalions were on the objective between 9 and 10 a.m. As the XVII Corps had not advanced beyond la Folie, a defensive left flank was formed, which was withdrawn in the evening when the 61st Division came up. Patrols sent out both during the day and at night found the railway still held by the Germans. Both divisions of Lieut.-General Haldane's corps had reached the objective; their casualties had not been severe and about six hundred prisoners had been picked up; but here again the forward outpost line had not been reached.

The 61st Division (Major-General F. J. Duncan) of the XVII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. Fergusson) had to form the left of the line. It had the same artillery support as the 19th Division on the previous day, except that the two brigades of the 19th Division took the place of the II New Zealand Field Artillery Brigade, and it thus had nine brigades, under the command of Br.-General R. G. Ouseley. An intermediate objective about half-way to the Army line, just short of a brook, was fixed, and the 183rd and 182nd Brigades (Br.-Generals B. D. L. G. Anley and W. K. Evans) were detailed to attack at 4 a.m.

The Ecaillon stream, just ahead, was still fordable in this reach; but arrangements were made to construct twenty foot-bridges at zero hour, and later two field artillery bridges near St. Martin and Sommaing. The 183rd Brigade passed through St. Martin, and Bermerain on the far side of the Ecaillon without much difficulty, and the first objective was reached. Here the 183rd was forced to stay and form a left defensive flank, as the 182nd Brigade was in trouble. The 2/6th and 2/7th R. Warwickshire, of the latter brigade, found the stream still had wire on both sides, for, being in the trough of the valley, it had been missed by the barrage;

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the few men who managed to get across were counter-attacked heavily from Vendegies, and driven back ; only two platoons on the left succeeding in remaining on the far side of the stream west of Sommaing, where they held on all day. At 11.15 a.m. Major General Duncan came up to the headquarters of the two brigades, which were close together north of Haussy, and from there ordered the 184th Brigade (Br.-General A. F. A. N. Thorne) to cross the Ruesnes–Bermerain road at 4 p.m., under a barrage fired by four field brigades, pass through the successful 183rd and make for the final objective ; it was to detail a force (two companies of the 2/5th Gloucestershire were sent) to attack Vendegies from the north-east. At the same time, the reserve battalion of the 182nd Brigade, the 2/8th Worcestershire, marching by arrangement through the First Army area, would attack Vendegies from the north-west, under a barrage fired by one field brigade.

Enemy shelling delayed the advance of the 184th Brigade, and it was seventy-five minutes late at the starting line ; but the opposition was slight and in the dark the leading waves went far enough to get in touch with the support line of the VI Corps on the right. The 2/8th Worcestershire, in co-operation with troops of the 4th Division (First Army) on the left, attacked through Sommaing about 4.45 p.m. against some machine-gun opposition, and, going on, found Vendegies evacuated, and the two companies of the 2/5th Gloucestershire, which had lost touch in the darkness, about to enter the north-east corner of the village. The other two battalions of the 182nd Brigade then marched through Vendegies and occupied a line beyond it, making junction with the First Army near Mur Copse. The distribution of the 61st Division was then in three echelons : just short of the final objective, on the intermediate objective, and in front of Vendegies, the troops at the last named place being in touch with the First Army. In spite of its varied fortunes, the division had taken about four hundred prisoners.

The First Army[1]

By the morning of the 24th October the Canadian Corps and the VIII Corps, the centre and greater part of the left

[1] See Sketch 28.

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of the First Army, had advanced up to the Schelde, but the extreme left was not quite up to that river. It was now the turn of the XXII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Godley), on the right, which had remained nearly stationary on the Ecaillon since the 20th, to push forward, and to do so in co-operation with the Third Army. As general objective, the XXII Corps was given the high ground south of Quérenaing–Maing–the Schelde south of Trith, with exploitation to the le Quesnoy–Valenciennes railway, including, in any case, the village of Quérenaing. Sixteen brigades of field artillery and eight of heavy were available under Br.-General E. W. M. Powell to support the attack. The Canadian Corps was to co-operate with artillery fire from north of the Schelde.[1]

The 4th and 51st Divisions (Major-Generals C. H. T. Lucas and G. T. C. Carter-Campbell) made the attack at 4 a.m. The former had four objectives: the first, across the Ecaillon, was the Sommaing–Monchaux road, which was just beyond the German main line of defence; the second, the high ground a thousand yards beyond the first; the third, the Sommaing–Maing road; the fourth, for the right brigade only, a position facing Quérenaing on the south; it was from this last that the village was to be taken.

The 51st Division had three objectives: the first, beyond the Ecaillon, carried on that of the 4th Division to Thiant; the second was the Quérenaing–Maing road; and the third about five hundred yards east of Maing to the Schelde canal.

The Ecaillon in this lower reach was about twenty feet wide and at least four feet deep, with steep banks, a noticeable current and a muddy bottom. Footbridges had been made by the engineers, and the infantry had rehearsed

[1] For the right division: the artillery of the 4th and 49th Divisions, and the XVII, XXVI, LII, 175th and 282nd Army Brigades, under Br.-General C. A. Sykes.

For the left division: the artillery of the 39th and 51st Divisions, and the LXXVII, 147th and 189th Army Brigades, under Br.-General L. C. L. Oldfield.

Heavy Brigades: VII, VIII, XXXIV, XLII, XLVIII, LIII, LXXVIII and LXXXI, under Br.-General L. J. Chapman, C.H.A. VIII Corps. Four brigades were to be used for counter-battery work and four for the barrage and bombardment. On the completion of the barrage, the VIII and XXXIV Brigades would come under the tactical commands of the divisions.

Canadian artillery: the 5th Division brigades assisted in the barrage; the 60-pdrs. carried out counter-battery work and the 6-inch howitzers bombarded selected points.

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laying them on the Selle ; they were duly carried forward to site and thrown across ; some of them unfortunately proved too short, so that resort had to be made to wading, with water up to the armpits, and even swimming.

The leading brigades of both divisions, the 10th, 11th and 153rd (Br.-Generals J. Greene, W. J. Webb-Bowen and W. Green), in spite of wire entanglements and artillery and trench-mortar fire, crossed the Ecaillon and reached the first objective. The advance of the 2/Duke of Wellington's and 1/R. Warwickshire of the 10th Brigade to the second was strongly opposed by fire from trenches near Mur Copse, and, the 61st Division on their right being driven back, as we have seen, they were held up about two hundred yards short of the top of the slope. The 1/Somerset L.I. and 1/Hampshire of the 11th Brigade by 7 a.m. fought their way to the second objective. Monchaux, on the left, had offered stout resistance ; but an officer of the Hampshire who had crossed the Ecaillon north of the village took prisoner a German officer and persuaded him to surrender Monchaux with its garrison of a hundred men. The front being narrowed by the advance, the Somerset went on alone towards the German trench, which covered the third objective, and some seventy or eighty men got within fifty yards of its wire. At 4.45 p.m. the 10th Brigade, in co-operation with the 182nd Brigade (61st Division), on the right, whose movements have already been described, attacked under an artillery barrage and took Mur Copse and the high ground north of it, the second objective, and the 11th Brigade then withdrew the Somerset L.I. The casualties of the 4th Division had been about five hundred, and it had taken nearly nine hundred prisoners.

In the 153rd Brigade the 1/6th and 1/7th Black Watch advanced punctually at 6.10 a.m. from the first objectives under the barrage ; the chief opposition came from Maing, a sunken road south of this village, and the Château des Près a mile north of it. Progress was slow, the barrage got ahead, and it was not until 10.30 a.m. that the second objective was completely occupied. There a long struggle, with street fighting in Maing, ensued, so that it was 3 p.m. before the third objective east of the village was secured, after a section of B/256th Battery R.F.A. had done particularly good service.

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The new line of the XXII Corps, therefore, extended from near Sommaing to Trith on the Schelde.[1]

Two bridges over the Ecaillon at Thiant for field artillery were constructed by the 404th Field Company R.E. and finished by 10.30 a.m. and 11.45 a.m.; a third, south of the village, was put over during the afternoon by the 400th Field Company R.E., and a heavy bridge for lorries and tanks by 7.50 a.m. (26th).

The Canadian Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Currie), being already close up to the Schelde on its whole front, did not attack on the 24th.

In the VIII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Hunter-Weston), the 8th Division found by reconnaissance that Odomez was still strongly held, and postponed attack till next day. The 12th Division made a little progress, the 6/Buffs (37th Brigade), taking Buridon and Bruille after a bombardment, and reaching the Schelde; the extreme left was still held up by the well-wired Fort de Maulde position, as was also the right of the Fifth Army; but information gained from prisoners and civilians pointed to an early German retirement to the line of the Schelde, here and on the whole front of the Fifth Army, and fires and demolitions were seen close to the river, indications of final preparations for withdrawal. These signs were confirmed by air reconnaissance on all fronts, which showed that the enemy was removing aerodromes and destroying railways near the front.

By the 24th October the succession of heavy blows dealt by the British forces, coupled with the determined fighting of the American First Army in the Argonne at a very vital point of the enemy front in respect of his communications, had produced a cumulative effect, both moral and material, upon the German Armies. Their difficulty in replacing the enormous losses in guns, machine guns and ammunition had increased with every fresh attack, and their reserves of men were practically exhausted. In the Selle battle (17th–24th October) the 24 British and 2 American divisions which had been engaged had, in spite of both natural and artificial obstacles, steadily gained ground and had captured a further twenty thousand prisoners and 475 guns from the

[1] The casualties of the 51st Division are not available; it took 233 prisoners.

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31 German divisions opposed to them. Although enemy troops could still be found to offer stout resistance from good cover, the infantry and machine-gunners were no longer reliable, and cases had been reported of their retirement without fighting ahead of the artillery barrage. The German army was, however, far from disintegrated, although it was "patchy," some divisions fighting well, others poorly; remnants of the old discipline and, even more, fear of punishment, held it together. It was capable of withdrawing to a shorter front and making a stand behind a good obstacle such as a river. Some of the machine gunners and the artillery still fought well, but without the combination of the earlier days, and without the old lavish expenditure of gun ammunition. Of this last the British had plenty, the difficulty was to get it to the front, owing to the damage done to rail and road by the enemy before retirement or by means of delay-action charges, which required strenuous exertions of the artillery and the engineers to overcome.

In Italy on the 24th the Battle of Vittorio Veneto had been begun by successful spear-head thrusts of French and British troops; in the Balkans hostilities with Bulgaria had ceased on the 30th September, and the Allied forces were advancing through Serbia and Albania; in the Palestine theatre, the pursuit was continuing and Allied forces were nearing Aleppo; and in Mesopotamia the British forces had just begun the advance on Mosul.

The German Government were not ready to accept the peace terms which the Allies were likely to offer; their object was to gain time. To leave the enemy Armies undisturbed would be to permit them to prepare and withdraw to new and shorter defence lines, in which they might protract the struggle over the winter—Maréchal Foch said at this time that he expected the Germans to hold out until the spring.[1] Sir Douglas Haig considered that a very little more hustling would bring about a collapse, and therefore decided to continue attack as soon as possible after the capture of Valenciennes, which he regarded as a necessary preliminary to the forcing of the Schelde line. The attack of the inner

[1] Repeated by Colonel Desticker, Aide Major-Général, to the compiler on 23rd October 1918, when on a visit to the Generalissimo's headquarters at Senlis.

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flanks of the Third and First Armies on Valenciennes, began on the 1st November, as will be narrated, and in the interval, 25th–31st October, fighting continued at a few places, but no events of importance took place, and the Armies made preparations for the great offensive which was to follow.

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CHAPTER XXV

The Halt Between the River Selle and the Rivers Sambre and Schelde

The Fourth, Third and First Armies

25th–31st October

(Sketches, 27, 28, 30)

The pause which now ensued was very welcome to the troops.

It must not be overlooked that pauses were necessary not only for the purpose of reconstructing communications and getting up ammunition, but to give the troops rest and sleep after their numerous night marches and early morning attacks. They had been " on the go " since August with very little respite, bivouacking the whole time, and probably only young troops—and the majority of " other ranks " were now very young—who could snatch sleep at any moment, even with the sun shining in their faces, could have stood the strain.

Losses during the months of August, September and October in the British, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand divisions, amounted, in infantry and cavalry alone, to nearly three hundred thousand out of a total fighting strength of about 1,200,000 (total strength, 1,800,000);[1] the numbers, however, always about 25 per cent. below establishment in the infantry, had been nearly kept up by reinforcements, as the following figures, for infantry and cavalry only, indicate :[2]

[1] According to the War Office figures, the total casualties, including all the Army and corps troops and divisional troops of all arms, were :—

	Officers	Other Ranks
August	6,084	116,188
September	5,904	108,927
October	5,438	115,608
	17,426	340,723

" Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great " War 1914–1920 " H.M. Stationery Office.

[2] Authority, Adjutant-General's War Diary, August, September, October 1918.

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	Casualties		Reinforcements	
	Officers	Other Ranks	Officers	Other Ranks
August ..	4,450	97,232	4,417	83,594
September ..	4,563	103,900	4,249	78,943
October ..	3,705	81,003	4,333	87,575
	12,718	282,135	12,999	250,112

The prisoners taken in the same 3-month period were: Officers, 4,309; Other ranks, 162,938.

THE FOURTH ARMY [1]

On the 25th October the IX Corps of the Fourth Army sent patrols into Catillon and Ors, establishing posts in the latter on the 27th, and reconnoitred the Sambre canal for suitable crossing places. On the 29th the 2nd Brigade (1st Division) in a minor operation pushed forward posts to the canal bank from Lock No. 1 to a thousand yards south of Catillon, with a left defensive flank. The immediate enemy counter-attack was driven off. Early next morning the Germans counter-attacked again, and succeeded in driving back this outpost line. An immediate counter-attack having failed, an organized one was made at 11 a.m., and the line was re-established. At 6 a.m. on the 30th the 16th Brigade (6th Division), under a barrage, attacked two strongly fortified farms at the south-western end of Happegarbes which had given trouble. This attack failed, but a second attempt, made at 9 a.m., was successful. Shortly after 2 p.m. the enemy recaptured the farms, but was again ejected. The 16th Brigade also cleared all existing German posts from the western bank of the canal near Ors and northward of that village.

The XIII Corps on the 26th made an attack on Mont Carmel, near the boundary with the Third Army, in order to combine with the operation of that Army. The mount, about a thousand yards ahead, was no more than a field slightly higher than its neighbours, and affording no great advantage of observation, owing to the enclosed nature of

[1] See Sketch 30.

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the country. At 1 a.m. the 53rd Brigade (Br.-General M. G. H. Barker) of the 18th Division, on a frontage of a mile and a half, made the attack, which included Hecq Church, under a barrage, whilst the heavy artillery shelled the western edge of the Forest of Mormal. Thick mist prevailed, and the country was not only enclosed, but also dotted with houses, many of which were held by the Germans. The assembly, too, of the troops—10/Essex and 8/R. Berkshire, with two companies of the 7/West Kent attached to the latter, the remainder being in reserve—was subjected to a certain amount of counter-preparation, the enemy being on the alert owing to local fighting round Robersart on the previous day; but the battalions started to time. Their fortunes varied: two companies of the Essex got within a short distance of the objective, a third being driven back by trench-mortar fire; two platoons of one company of the Berkshire reached the objective, the other two companies being held up almost at once after reaching a sunken road; of the two companies of the West Kent, one was checked about two hundred yards from the objective, and the other established a liaison post with the Third Army at the south-eastern corner of Englefontaine. At 8 a.m., when the mist lifted, the enemy opened heavy fire on the two Berkshire platoons and forced them back on the other companies. Gaps were filled and the sunken road consolidated, with posts pushed forward towards the objective; but no further attempt to advance was made until the 4th November.

The Third Army [1]

The Third Army gained some ground owing to the enemy's retirement.

No orders for the 25th were issued by General Byng; the corps were left to continue the operations of the previous day. This meant that the V Corps should take Englefontaine; the IV Corps turn the enemy off the railway near Ghissignies; the centre and left of the XVII Corps come up level with its right; and that all four corps should, after digging in, push forward a strong outpost line. As the operations were begun by the XVII Corps, they will be narrated beginning on the left.

[1] See Sketch 27.

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The whole front of the XVII Corps was held by the 61st Division (183rd Brigade on the right, 184th in the centre, and 182nd on the left), and orders were given to the 184th Brigade (Br.-General A. F. A. N. Thorne), supported by two brigades of field artillery and one company of machine guns, to take over the divisional front and advance at 4 a.m. When the brigade went forward the enemy had disappeared, and by 9 a.m. the le Quesnoy–Valenciennes railway was reached without opposition, and Sepmeries was found evacuated. After consolidating, as ordered, the 184th Brigade resumed its advance at 4 p.m., with the object of ascertaining the whereabouts of the enemy and if possible of establishing bridgeheads over the Rhonelle stream. The 2/4th Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire L.I. and 2/4th R. Berkshire, which were leading, soon came under heavy fire from the northern bank of the Rhonelle and from Artres, on their left, and fell back to the railway line, but established posts north and west of Sepmeries.

In the VI Corps patrols of both the 3rd and 2nd Divisions early discovered that the enemy had retired from the railway. They already had instructions from Lieut.-General Haldane to follow him up if he showed signs of withdrawing, so at 9.40 a.m. the 3rd Division gave orders to the 8th Brigade (Br.-General B. D. Fisher) with the Oxfordshire Hussars (corps cavalry) and a machine-gun company attached, to advance through the 9th Brigade in the line and, as the weather was unfavourable for air reconnaissance, gain touch with the enemy. One hussar squadron advanced beyond the railway, found the front clear of the enemy and established a post at la Croisette, and at 2.30 p.m. the 1/R. Scots Fusiliers (8th Brigade) relieved the 9th Brigade parties on the railway, and pushed forward an outpost line, which came under shell fire, but was not opposed by infantry.

The two leading battalions of the 99th Brigade of the 2nd Division about midday occupied the railway with a line of posts, and at 3.30 p.m. an outpost line was established which, like that of the 3rd Division, was subjected to artillery fire.

In the 37th Division (Major-General H. Bruce Williams) of the IV Corps, the 1/1st Hertfordshire (112th Brigade) at 10 a.m. made another attempt to seize the railway east of Ghissignies, after a bombardment by artillery and trench

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mortars; but it failed under fire from both flanks. At 10.50 a.m., when information of the retreat of the enemy in front of the VI Corps arrived, the 3rd New Zealand (Rifle) Brigade (Br.-General H. E. Hart), holding the line of its division, was ordered to keep touch with the enemy by patrols and to wheel half-right to a north–south line facing and a thousand yards distant from le Quesnoy. The 3rd Rifle Battalion did this easily; the 4th, on the left, met with some opposition from the railway, but completed the line along it to the VI Corps.

The V Corps made preparation to capture Englefontaine by a night attack. It had during the day to deal with several small counter-attacks, but otherwise had a quiet time. The night attack made at 1 a.m. on the 26th, under a barrage fired by the same five field artillery brigades as had supported the 33rd Division (Major-General Sir R. Pinney) on the 23rd and 24th, was entirely successful; the enemy showed very little fight, and the casualties were under a hundred.[1] The 4/King's (98th) attacked on the south to reach the south-eastern corner of Englefontaine, its right protected by the Mont Carmel movement of the Fourth Army already described, and the 1/Queen's (19th Brigade) attacked on the north, its left guarded by the 16/K.R.R.C. (100th Brigade) and protected by a standing barrage; a little later the 2/Worcestershire and the Glasgow Highlanders (100th Brigade), advanced through the village and mopped it up, taking many prisoners, and making the divisional total for the day, 430.[2]

In the IV Corps on the 26th, the enemy shelling with gas and high explosive was heavy. The 37th Division did not undertake operations; the 3rd New Zealand (Rifle) Brigade, in an attempt to reach Orsinval, had fighting all day, the enemy constantly counter-attacking; but by evening, although the railway was now more securely held, no progress had been made.

[1] The attack caught the *38th Division* in process of relief by the *14th Division*.

[2] The totals 23rd to 26th, were: 33rd Division, 949 (on 22nd 531); 21st Division, 665.

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In the VI Corps Lieut.-General Haldane, after his successes of the two previous days, was inclined to push on. He detailed the 3rd Division (Major-General C. J. Deverell) with the corps mounted troops (Oxfordshire Hussars and one company of the VI Corps Cyclist battalion), the LXXXVI Brigade R.F.A. and LXXXIV Brigade R.G.A., to take over the whole corps front and, as advanced guard, to follow up and maintain touch with the enemy, but not to attack against organized resistance without reference to him. The relief of the outposts of the 2nd Division by the 3rd Division was completed by 6 a.m., and at 7 a.m. the Oxfordshire Hussars pushed out patrols, which, taking advantage of the morning mist, were able to report that La Croisette Farm and Villers Pol were strongly held by the enemy, and the two bridges over the Rhonelle at the latter place blown up. As it was not intended to become seriously engaged, no advance was therefore made by the 3rd Division.[1]

Instructions similar to Lieut.-General Haldane's were given by Lieut.-General Fergusson to the XVII Corps. The 61st Division (Major-General F. J. Duncan) found the enemy still holding the farther bank of the Rhonelle, but the château south of Artres was found clear of the enemy and occupied by the 2/4th R. Berkshire (184th Brigade) at 10 a.m. At the same hour the 4th Division of the First Army, on the left, attacked and took Artres, and by 1.20 p.m. had crossed the Rhonelle, where it established a line of posts east of the stream. At 5 p.m. the Berkshire advanced again, and joined its line to the bridgehead of the First Army.

A period of almost stationary warfare now ensued, lasting until the 1st November, with both sides "dug in", whilst preparations for the next offensive were being made, the First Army striving to reach the Rhonelle and the Schelde where it had not already done so. In anticipation of the offensive and in view of constant bursts of enemy gas and high-explosive shelling, an artillery policy had been formulated on the 26th: all efforts were to be made by aeroplane, balloon and sound-rangers to locate enemy guns; heavy artillery was to be moved forward as required to engage them:

[1] During the period 20th–26th October, the VI Corps, with 4 divisions, had taken 3,252 prisoners of the *4th*, *9th Reserve*, *21st Reserve*, *25th*, *48th Reserve*, *113th* and *185th Divisions* at a cost of about two thousand casualties.

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harassing fire, as far as the ammunition situation allowed, was to be maintained day and night both by field and heavy artillery on all roads which led to the front. Enemy machine-gun fire was kept down by trench-mortars and sniping. Active patrolling for reconnaissance purposes and frequent raids to worry the enemy and obtain information were carried out, the latter bringing an almost regular haul of ten to thirty or more prisoners.[1] Only one enemy raid had any success, when, on the 27th at 6 a.m. under a barrage, the Germans attacked in front of Englefontaine and, although driven off, they carried away twelve prisoners. An attempt on the 27th by the 183rd Brigade of the 61st Division (XVII Corps) to enlarge the bridgehead over the Rhonelle by crossing on a brigade frontage failed, as the farther bank of the stream was still strongly held; but on the night of the 28th/29th the bridgehead was extended, from within, about two hundred yards to the right. An attempt was made by patrols of the 183rd Brigade on the night of the 30th/31st to establish a bridgehead farther east at Maresches; but the enemy was found holding houses on the south side, and the blaze of a thatched cottage which was set on fire showed up the patrols; so the enterprise failed. Except for the formation of the small bridgehead on the Rhonelle, the situation of the Third Army had not changed during the five days 27th–31st October.

The First Army[2]

In the First Army on the 25th no change took place in the situation of the Canadian Corps, in the centre, which was already up to the Schelde, except a small advance on the left to the railway east of the Forest of Raismes, which the enemy had abandoned. Between the railway and the Schelde the ground was flooded. The VIII Corps, on the left, found in the early morning that Odomez had been evacuated, and a line along the road to Bruille was occupied by the 24th Brigade (8th Division). Beyond the point reached here also the ground was flooded.

[1] Mainly of the *10th Ersatz, 22nd, 35th, 111th, 113th* and *214th Divisions*.
[2] See Sketch 28.

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The XXII Corps, on the right, made an advance towards the Rhonelle. At 7 a.m. the 12th Brigade (Br.-General E. B. Macnaghten), the left wing of the 4th Division north of the Verchain–Quérenaing road, and the 152nd and 153rd Brigades (Br.-Generals W. H. E. Segrave and W. Green) of the 51st Division, attacked. The objectives were, for the 4th Division, first Quérenaing village and then the railway beyond, and for the 51st Division, a line through Gaumont Farm (half-way between Quérenaing and Famars) and Mont Rouge (about half a mile north-west of Gaumont Farm), thence bent back to the Schelde; and secondly Famars and Mont Houy (2,000 yards south-west of Aulnoy, and 1,500 yards south of le Poirier). Barrages were to be fired respectively by three field brigades and one heavy, and six field and one heavy.[1]

The 12th Brigade took its objectives and repulsed a counter-attack on the left at 6 p.m., with a loss of only 140 men. The 152nd Brigade met with more opposition, but by 10 a.m. had reached its first objective, east of the railway. The 153rd Brigade encountered still more resistance, and did not gain the whole of its intermediate objective, west of the railway, until 2.30 p.m. Between 4 and 5 p.m. the 152nd was driven back to the railway by a counter-attack under a heavy barrage; the 153rd repulsed the attack, and when the enemy advanced again at 6 p.m. went out to meet him and drove him back and reached the railway, which therefore became the new front line of the 51st Division.

On the 26th October the Canadian Corps continued to stand fast on the Schelde. In the XXII Corps, if no serious opposition was encountered, the 4th Division was to establish a bridgehead over the Rhonelle on the Artres–Préseau road and seize the high ground north of Artres so as to join with the 51st Division south-east of Famars, and form further bridgeheads if possible; the 51st Division was first to gain a line through the middle of Famars, and secondly one including the whole of Famars and Mont Houy. Zero hour was made 10 a.m., and the 12th, 152nd and 153rd Brigades again

[1] For the 4th Division, its own and the XVII (Army) Brigade R.F.A., and the VIII Brigade R.G.A.

For the 51st Division, its own, the 186th (39th Division) and the LXXVII, 147th and 189th (Army) Brigades R.F.A., with the XXXIV Brigade R.G.A.

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carried out the operation under barrages. Considerable opposition was encountered. The 2/Lancashire Fusiliers and the 2/Essex of the 12th Brigade took Artres; a platoon of the former got across the Rhonelle by the broken main bridge in the village, and by 1.20 p.m. a line of posts had been formed on the eastern bank covering both bridges in Artres. By 11.30 a.m. the 6th/7th Gordon Highlanders (152nd Brigade) with the 1/4th Gordon (attached from the 154th) and the 1/6th Black Watch (153rd) had taken all the objectives except Mont Houy, a little hill bristling with machine guns, and le Poirier station. An enemy counter-attack made at 5 p.m. after an hour's bombardment struck the junction of the two divisions, and was finally repulsed; but a renewed British attack against Mont Houy in the dark at 9 p.m. failed.[1]

On the front of the 8th Division of the VIII Corps, the floods were found to have subsided a little by the evening of the 26th, and a patrol was able to reach the western bank of the Schelde on the Odomez–Hergnies road and establish a post there.

In the 12th Division, during the early morning Fort Justice was found evacuated and was occupied, posts being established on the Scarpe, and during the night of the 26th/27th and early morning of the 27th the 7/R. Sussex took Château de l'Abbaye, a village beyond the Scarpe, and posted a line overlooking the Schelde, which was now completely under observation on the VIII Corps front.

The 69th Field Company R.E. put a floating bridge across the Schelde during the night of the 26th/27th east of Bruille without interference, as the enemy was holding the canal some six hundred yards beyond the river.

On the 27th no alteration took place in the line of the First Army. During the morning Famars was heavily shelled, and at 11.30 a.m. a German attack drove the 1/4th Gordon Highlanders back to the western edge of the village; but the battalion counter-attacked at 12.50 p.m., and, after street fighting, threw the enemy out.[2]

[1] The casualties were about 500, many from gas, and 262 prisoners were taken.

[2] The attack was made by the reserve battalions of the *61st* and *176th Regiments* of the *35th Division*. Famars is described as the "angle point" in the divisional front.

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In the 8th Division the 2/Devonshire (23rd Brigade) attempted to cross the Schelde at 6.20 p.m. at three places, in front of Odomez, at Hergnies and in front of Bruille. A creeping barrage was fired by three brigades of field and one of heavy artillery after twenty minutes' bombardment. Strong resistance was encountered and only one platoon got across at Odomez; but at 11 a.m. next day the Germans recaptured the small bridgehead which had been formed.

On the 27th General Horne held a conference at Auberchicourt (11 miles west of Valenciennes), to which his advanced headquarters had been moved on the previous day, with the commanders of the XXII and Canadian Corps, a General Staff officer of the Third Army being present. As a result of the conference, orders were issued for the XXII and Canadian Corps, with the co-operation of the XVII Corps (Third Army) to continue operations to force the enemy to evacuate Valenciennes. The operations were to be carried out in three stages:

First Stage: On the 28th the XXII Corps was to capture Mont Houy, and the Aulnoy–le Poirier road (Aulnoy exclusive); on the night of the 28th/29th the Canadian Corps was to relieve the troops of the XXII Corps in the sector between the Rhonelle south of Aulnoy and le Poirier.

Second Stage: On the 30th the two corps were to capture Préseau and the Préseau–Marly road (Marly exclusive), and thence occupy a line westward to the Schelde. The XVII Corps was to co-operate by taking Maresches and by covering the right flank of the First Army. On the night of the 30th/31st the Canadian Corps was to take over more of the XXII Corps front, as far as the Famars–Estreux road (inclusive).

Third Stage: On the 1st November the XXII and Canadian Corps were to complete the envelopment of Valenciennes from the south.

It may be remarked that this plan of turning Valenciennes from the south, where the XXII Corps was already well across the Schelde, avoided having to force a passage of the river and canal west and north of the city in the original Canadian Corps sector, where the banks were strongly wired and the valley had been flooded in many places to a considerable width.

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The 4th Division did not change its position on the 28th ; but the 1/4th Seaforth Highlanders (154th Brigade) of the 51st Division attacked at 5.15 a.m. under a barrage fired by four brigades of field artillery and the XXXIV Brigade R.G.A., with Mont Houy and le Poirier as the first objective. The hill was reached and passed over against considerable opposition ; but the trenches on the hill were never completely mopped up, and the Seaforth were not strong enough to maintain their position. About midday they were forced back a little, but remained near enough to prevent Mont Houy from being used for observation purposes, and they held le Poirier. They had taken 190 prisoners.

At night the 146th and 147th Brigades of the 49th Division (in reserve of the XXII Corps) relieved the 152nd Brigade (51st Division), and also took over about five hundred yards of the 4th Division front. It had been intended that a brigade of the 4th Canadian Division should relieve the 154th Brigade (which had relieved the 153rd), the rest of the Canadian Corps extending southwards ; in view, however, of the uncertainty of the position at Mont Houy, the change-over was postponed for 24 hours. The attack on the 30th in the second stage was likewise put off until the 31st, and the third stage from the 1st to the 2nd November. No alteration took place on the 28th in the line of the VIII Corps, except reliefs, the 52nd Division, from reserve, taking the place of the 12th.

On the 29th no alteration took place in the line of the First Army except a slight enlargement of the Artres bridge-head by an advance of the 1/Rifle Brigade (4th Division) northward. The 1/6th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (51st Division) repulsed two counter-attacks, one at 6.30 a.m. and the other at 4.30 p.m. ; the brigade to which it belonged, the 154th, was relieved during the night by the 10th Canadian Brigade (4th Canadian Division), the G.O.C. 49th Division at 10 a.m. taking over the rest of the 51st Division front held by his 146th and 147th Brigades. The boundary of the XXII and Canadian Corps then became a line just south of Famars.

the 30th and 31st October no change in the situation First Army occurred. The only operation carried

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out was by the 8th Division. It had been intended that on the night of the 2nd/3rd November the 23rd Brigade (Br.-General G. W. St. G. Grogan) should establish a bridgehead over the Schelde opposite Odomez, where the canal and river ran in one channel, with the Canal du Jard and a parallel road, with a ribbon development of houses, beyond. At noon on the 30th October, Major-General Heneker, in order to have only one water line to pass on the day of the offensive, and in expectation that the 52nd Division, on his left, would also push over the river, ordered the 23rd Brigade to cross that evening. By 9 p.m. the 490th Field Company R.E. had constructed a light-cylinder bridge, but it collapsed, and it was not fully repaired until 4 a.m. on the 31st; so most of the 2/Devonshire, the battalion employed, crossed by rafts. Very little opposition was offered, and by 3 a.m. (31st) a bridgehead had been formed. At 8.30 a.m. the enemy opened a heavy bombardment, and as the Devonshire could not build much cover in the marshy ground, they began to suffer a good many casualties. As neither of the flank divisions was over the Schelde, the river being too flooded to cross, at 4 p.m. Major-General Heneker ordered the bridgehead troops to be withdrawn. Although the bridge was again broken, by 7.15 p.m. this had been done, all the wounded being brought away. The operation had cost the Devonshire about a hundred men.

The last day of October, therefore, saw the three Armies of the right wing still on the western banks of the Sambre, the Rhonelle and the Schelde, but ready to go forward to clear the enemy from his positions on the far side of these water lines.

Three great successive offensives were to take place: that of the left by the Group of Armies of Flanders, actually begun on the 31st,[1] of the right (American First Army and French Fourth Army) on the 1st November,[2] and that of the centre (French First Army and British Fourth, Third and First Armies) on the 4th November.[3]

On the 28th October Maréchal Foch had held a conference of the Allied Commanders-in-Chief at Senlis to consider

[1] See Chapter XXVIII.
[2] See Note to Chapter XXIX.
[3] Dealt with in Chapter XXX.

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terms of an armistice. General Pétain's suggestions were stiffer than those of Sir Douglas Haig, but General Pershing's were the most severe ; he proposed :

(1) The evacuation of France and Belgium within 30 days and of all other foreign territory occupied by Germany without delay.

(2) The withdrawal of the German Armies from Alsace and Lorraine and the occupation of those territories by the Allied Armies.

(3) The withdrawal of the German Armies to the east of the Rhine and the occupation by the Allies of such bridgeheads on the eastern side of the Rhine as might be judged necessary.

(4) The unhindered transportation of the American Army and its material across the seas.

(5) The immediate surrender of all nationals of foreign territory now or heretofore occupied by Germany during the War.

(6) Surrender of all U-boats and U-boat bases to the control of a neutral power until their disposition was otherwise determined.

(7) The return to France and Belgium of all railway and road rolling stock which had been seized by Germany from those countries.

Sir Douglas Haig, on instructions from his Government, pointed out that the German Army was still capable of withdrawing to a shorter front and making a stand against equal or greater forces ;[1] that the British and French Armies were exhausted and each about a quarter of a million men short of establishment ; and that the American Army lacked training and experience and was not yet complete,

[1] The estimated strengths of the Allies on the Western Front (exclusive of Italy) and of Germany were at the time estimated at :—

Rifles,	Allies	1,563,000
	Germany	1,134,000
Guns,	Allies	22,413
	Germany	16,495

Roughly, this was an advantage of only 36 per cent. in men and material in favour of the Allies ; but the Germans were no longer "ebenbürtig" in morale.

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and that some time must elapse before it would be large enough to relieve the diminishing Allied Armies. He thought that the terms should be such that the Germans would not hesitate to accept them: instead of entering Germany and going to the Rhine with bridgeheads beyond it, the British would be satisfied with the occupation by the Allies of Alsace-Lorraine and the fortresses of Metz and Strasbourg: "if hostilities should be resumed, I would "prefer" Sir Douglas Haig said, "to find the Germans en- "trenched behind their old frontier of 1870 rather than on "the right bank of the Rhine".

The feature of General Pétain's proposals was that the German Armies should be required to retire by stages, so rapidly that they would be compelled to leave most of their material behind, and therefore would be incapable of further fighting.

Maréchal Foch pointed out, in reply to the British Commander-in-Chief, that "it cannot be said that the German "Army is not defeated. Although we are not able to tell "its exact condition, still we are dealing with an army "which has been pounded every day for three months, "an army that is now being beaten on every part of its "front of 250 miles; an army which since the 15th July "has lost a quarter of a million in prisoners alone and over "four thousand guns; an army which is, physically and "morally, a thoroughly beaten army. Certainly the British "and French Armies are tired; certainly the American Army "is a young Army, but it is full of idealism and strength, "and ardour; it has won victories and is now on the eve of "another victory; and nothing gives wings to an Army like "victory. When one hunts a wild beast and finally comes "upon him at bay, one faces greater danger; but it is not "the time to stop; it is the time to redouble one's blows "without paying attention to those received in return".

On the 31st October, at a meeting of the commanders of the First, Third, Fourth and Fifth Armies at Cambrai, after a discussion of the situation and reference to the proposed terms of an armistice, Sir Douglas Haig summed up, and all agreed, that the enemy was fighting a very good rear-guard action, and that from a military standpoint he had not been sufficiently beaten to accept an ignominious peace.

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NOTE I

The French and Americans During 25th–31st October

(Sketch 26)

During the period 25th to 31st October, the Germans recommencing their retirement on the night of the 26th/27th, the French First Army came out of the re-entrant in which it had hung back since the 15th and drew almost level with the British Fourth Army to a north-south line from near Wassigny, past Guise (exclusive) with a short flank thrown forward to connect it to the British Fourth Army. On the 31st October, General Fayolle G.A.R., stopped the pursuit and ordered General Debeney to make preparations "for offensive operations which the left of the French First Army would be called on shortly to carry "out in conjunction with the British Fourth Army". (F.O.A. vii. ii., p. 202.

The Tenth Army, which on the 27th, on change of commanders, became the Third Army, advanced about four miles north-eastwards, pivoting on its right, which remained at Sissonne. The Fifth Army advanced about 2½ miles northward in the centre, its two flanks remaining stationary. The narrowing front of these three Armies of the French left wing by the 26th October allowed a reduction from 20 to 13 divisions and from 7 to 5 corps in the Fifth Army, the formations withdrawn being sent to Lorraine to form part of the new Tenth Army (F.O.A. Order of Battle Vol. i). The Fourth Army and the left of the American First Army in the Argonne stood fast,[1] the right of the American made a little progress. General Pershing (p. 661) states, "The 28th October "was tentatively designated as the date for the beginning of the "next general advance, but the French Fourth Army, which was "to support our attack on the left, notified us as late as the 27th "that it could not get ready in time; so the attack of both Armies "was fixed for November 1st."

NOTE II

The Germans During 25th–31st October

Certain now of the continuance of the Armistice negotiations, for which he had clamoured, telling the Kaiser that the War was [illegible]pprecht, p. 469), and feeling that he could now publicly

[redacted]th 21.

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throw the blame for the collapse of Germany on the Civil Government, on the 25th October Ludendorff issued an Order of the Day to the Army, giving copies to the Press, but not to the Government. It ran :[1]

> " Wilson's answer means military capitulation. It is " therefore unacceptable to us soldiers . . . . Wilson's " answer can be for us soldiers only a challenge to continue " resistance to the utmost of our power. When the enemy " realizes that the German front is not to be broken through " in spite of every sacrifice, he will be ready for a peace " which ensures Germany's future ".

The German Government first heard of the Order of the Day through the Press Bureau, and regarded it as a " stab in the back " —the original use of this term in 1918. When informed of the Chancellor's displeasure, Ludendorff decided, against Prince Max's express wish, to go to Berlin, bringing Hindenburg with him to " report " to the Kaiser and demand that President Wilson's terms should be rejected.

The Chancellor now made up his mind that Ludendorff must be dismissed, as the *Reichstag* had desired by acclamation, for he had lost all confidence in him. He announced this intention to the Kaiser, whom he found greatly irritated that an Order of the Day had been issued without his concurrence. At the audience which followed on the 27th the Kaiser told Ludendorff[2] that " the " difficult political situation which had arisen had as a matter of " fact been created by the military situation ; he invited the First " Quartermaster-General's attention to the disastrous effect of " his demand for an immediate armistice ; and formally gave him " notice of his decision to summon to Berlin two experienced " generals in order that they might report the state and feeling " of the Army to the Chancellor and to the War Cabinet. " . . . The General saw in this step a want of confidence on my " part and requested permission to resign. I could not do other- " wise than consent ".

Hindenburg also tendered his resignation, which the Kaiser declined to accept, saying that the General Field-Marshal—who was soon to advise his master's flight—was " the Palladium of " the German people ".

A reply to President Wilson was then drafted by the Foreign Minister. It ended with the words :

> " The German Government accordingly expect proposals for " an armistice, not a demand for laying down arms. Only thus " can the armistice lead to a just peace, such as the President " adumbrated in his Note ".[3] The other members of the War

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[1] Urkunden, p. 196.
[2] The Kaiser's own account, given in Niemann, p. 118.
[3] Max, p. 305

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Cannes but that President Wilson in receiving such a reply would abandon the rôle of intermediary and thus leave Germany as a defeated Power to the vengeance and vindictiveness of her foes. In the morning was received.

On the evening of the same day came the news that Austria-Hungary had collapsed and was about to ask Italy for an armistice.

On the 29th Generals von Gallwitz and von Mudra, the one an artillerist and the other an engineer, who had been summoned on the 27th, appeared before the War Cabinet. They certainly had the best record of the higher German commanders, yet the one was commanding the Group of Armies on the Argonne–Verdun front, and the other had been commanding the *Seventeenth Army*, whose frontage coincided with that of the British First Army, for only one month, having come from the *First Army* on the Reims front (German Crown Prince's Group of Armies). Only some of the other commanders of the right wing were interrogated, whose troops had been bracked back continuously since the 8th August, it was clear. The German Crown Prince himself had already reported that he "expected a continuation of the "hostile attacks and would not be able to hold them much "longer". (Rupprecht, p. 467).

Generals Gallwitz and Mudra, according to Prince Max, reported, "it depends upon the War Cabinet whether the front "holds or not; only if the Army receives a moral impulse from "the Homeland will it be able to resist the bad elements in its "own ranks and hold out long enough". General von Mudra emphasized particularly the lack of reinforcements and the exhaustion of the troops, saying, "if only the men could once "more have sleep". He told Crown Prince Rupprecht that he thought by retiring and holding a succession of shorter lines the struggle might be continued until April, and that the petrol required for flying would last till then.[1]

General von Gallwitz's own account (p. 437) is that he said: "we can hold out longer; but it is high time for a retirement to a "shorter line and for the arrival of the necessary reinforcements. "A formal appeal to the people and the Army is also required". As regards reinforcements, Herr Scheidemann (Secretary of State without Portfolio) remarked that "the enrolment in the "Army of pampered munition workers would be of doubtful "value".

[1] Friedensburg, in "Das Erdöl im Weltkrieg", published in 1940, states that at the end of the war in November, Germany had in hand only 70,000 tons of petrol, about six weeks' supply, the expenditure in 1917 [illegible] 1918 having been 1,410,000 and 1,470,000, and the consumption on Western Front alone in October 1918, 91,000 tons.

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The generals evaded the question whether in their opinion negotiations should be broken off, saying it was desirable to await President Wilson's answer; and this was the final decision of the War Cabinet.

General Gröner, Ludendorff's successor, formerly Chief of the Field Railways, raised no objection to the continuation of the armistice negotiations. He had probably been selected because of his special knowledge of transportation matters. The state of the railways had already given cause for alarm, and " a break-" down would entail a military catastrophe of the first order, if " indeed that had not already happened ". (Gallwitz, p. 456).

To add to German troubles: on the 26th Aleppo was occupied by the Allied forces; on the 30th the Turkish Army on the Tigris surrendered to the British forces, and next day, at 12 noon, hostilities between the Entente and Turkey ceased; revolution, too, broke out in Vienna, followed next day by revolution in Buda-Pest.

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CHAPTER XXVI

The Fifth Army's Pursuit to the Schelde

14th–31st October

(Sketch 31)

The Fifth Army (General Sir William Birdwood)[1] acted as the connecting link between the group of Armies (Fourth, Third and First) operating towards the Sambre and the upper course of the Schelde, and the international group in Flanders of which the Second Army was the southernmost member. On the 14th October the Fifth Army, having just taken over the 58th Division and its frontage from the First Army, consisted of :—

I Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Holland) :—

58th Division (Major-General F. W. Ramsay).
15th Division[2] (Major-General H. L. Reed).
16th Division[2] (Major-General A. B. Ritchie).

III Corps (Lieut.-General Sir R. Butler) :—

74th Division (Major-General E. S. Girdwood).
55th Division (Major-General H. S. Jeudwine).

XI Corps (Lieut.-General Sir R. Haking) :—

47th Division (Major-General Sir G. Gorringe).
57th Division[2] (Major-General R. W. R. Barnes).
59th Division (Major-General N. M. Smyth).

The Army artillery, under Major-General C. C. van Straubenzee, distributed to corps, consisted of three Army brigades R.F.A.,[3] six brigades of R.G.A.,[4] thirteen siege batteries and 15 anti-aircraft sections, making a total of heavy guns of 24, 60-pdrs; 82, 6-inch howitzers; 16, 6-inch guns; 12, 8-inch howitzers; 17, 9·2-inch howitzers; 13, 12-inch howitzers; 1, 15-inch howitzer. It may be said here that during the pursuit of the Germans the

[1] See p. 125.
[2] Re-constituted divisions.
[3] 150th, 158th and 179th.
[4] XVIII (Howitzer), XXVIII (Mixed), XLIV (Howitzer), XLVI (Mobile), XLIX (Howitzer) and LII (Howitzer).

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" heavies " were principally employed on harassing fire on the roads and tracks and on concentrations of fire on headquarters and exits of villages.

Of engineers, there were 11 Army Troops companies, and five tunnelling companies to deal with delay-action charges.

The X Brigade R.A.F. was, as before, with the Fifth Army. It contained eight squadrons—five (82 aircraft) with the 80th (Army) Wing, and three (70 aircraft) with the 81st (Corps) Wing. Tournai was heavily bombed on the night of the 14th/15th October; but on the 15th and 16th rain and mist hampered flying; on the 17th, however, the weather improved, visibility was slightly better and the retreating enemy was severely bombed.

The Army had a long frontage of about twenty miles[1] and just ahead of it lay the Haute Deule canal and a stretch of low-lying water-logged country intersected with drainage channels which extended as far as the Lille–Seclin–Douai railway, near which the ground begins to rise slightly. This higher portion which extends to the line of the Scarpe–Schelde is divided through the middle by the south-north course of the la Marque and intersected by its tributaries. Only four miles in front of the left wing was the great industrial town of Lille, surrounded by a Vauban enceinte, a ring of obsolete forts, and very complete trench-warfare defences.[2] The French Government were insistent that Lille should be recaptured " without hurting it ", and it was part of the general plan that the Lille area opposite the Fifth Army should be cleared by the combination of a thrust north-eastward by the British Fourth, Third and First Armies and an offensive eastward of the Flanders Group.[3]

The general policy in the employment of artillery fire against the enemy sheltering in Lille and other French and Belgian towns, Tournai for instance, had been the subject of a special G.H.Q. instruction dated the 4th October. Damage was to be avoided as far as consistent with tactical requirements; it was, however, admissible to use artillery for harassing fire and to gas the entrances and exits of the city and of its suburbs, to destroy bridges and form blocks

[1] See Sketch 31.

[2] The German defences of Lille will be found described in a pamphlet by Major (now Major-General) B. T. Wilson, D.S.O., R.E., published by the Institution of Royal Engineers.

[3] See p. 233.

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on routes likely to be used by the enemy during his withdrawal, to harass, block and destroy railway stations and communications, and to employ gas shell; if the Lille defences were used as the enemy's main line of resistance it was further permissible to carry out counter-battery shoots, with air or ground observation, against guns emplaced in the city or in its suburbs. Fortunately the Germans knew they were beaten and, fearing reprisals, did not attempt the wholesale destruction which they executed by order of O.H.L. in the retreat to the Hindenburg Line in February 1917.

It was evident that the retirement of the German *Sixth Army*, whose front extended from Henin Liétard, exclusive, opposite to the Fifth Army, but continuing northwards as far as Ypres, could not be much longer delayed.[1] Indications such as artillery disposed in small packets, even by single guns, in great depth; fires and demolitions, including explosions of ammunition dumps, behind the enemy's front; besides the statements of prisoners, tended to suggest that he would shortly drop back from the line of the Haute Deule canal to another line east of Lille. But it was believed that no serious stand would be made until the Schelde was reached. Every preparation was, therefore, made to follow up the Germans with advanced guards and for the main bodies to proceed by bounds.

On the 14th, as usual, considerable shelling was carried out by both sides, and a certain amount of other activity took place, some small gains being made by the Fifth Army; but early on the 15th, the German *Sixth Army*, both its flanks being endangered, began to retire on the whole Fifth Army front, covered by rear guards.[2] Against the usual

[1] The *Sixth Army* is believed to have consisted at this date of ten divisions, from south to north: *49th Reserve, 11th Reserve, 16th, 36th, 4th Ersatz, 2nd Guard Reserve, 23rd Reserve* and *12th* in front line, with the *111th* and *4th* in reserve, refitting. The *23rd Reserve* was fresh, the *12th* an assault division; the rest were "tired". Civilians in the recovered villages stated that the morale of the German troops was very poor, the rations were scanty and of poor quality and that there was much marauding.

[2] Orders for this were issued by Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group of Armies at midday on the 14th, in consequence of the break-in in Flanders being deeper than expected. Ludendorff had on the 12th approved of the withdrawal of the *Sixth Army* on account of the forcing back of its neighbour, the *Seventeenth Army*, by the First Army to the gates of Douai and the line of the Haute Deule canal, so that the *Sixth Army* was outflanked on the south. See Note II, Chapter XVIII.

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opposition offered by snipers, machine guns, cyclists and cavalry patrols, the I Corps, except the right division, crossed the canal, which it had already reached, by foot-bridges, and advanced nearly two miles; the III Corps closed up to the canal, and the XI Corps made an advance of about a mile to the edge of the Lille defended area.

On the 16th the right wing made an advance averaging four miles, the left, with the Haute Deule canal and the Lille defences in front of it, gained for the most part less than a mile. The I Corps gave the eastern side of Carvin, Canin and Allennes as the objective, but at 11 a.m. fixed a more distant one, which on the right was just beyond the Douai–Lille railway between Evin Malmaison and Libercourt, and thence north-west to Ennecourt–Chemy. This new order[1] did not reach the battalions in front line until after 4 p.m., and then, as some were halted, some on the move, caused a little confusion.

The 58th Division had crossed the east-west reach of the Haute Deule canal by improvised means, the 9/London of the 175th Brigade (Br.-General H. W. Cobham) in the early morning, and the 8/London of the 174th Brigade (Br.-General C. A. Maxwell) earlier during the night of the 15th/16th. Wavrechin and the Bois d'Harponlieu were cleared by the 9/London and about midday the 7/London (174th Brigade) took Oignies. At 6.45 p.m., after receipt of the 11 a.m. order, under cover of a bombardment, the battalion again advanced and established itself on the Douai–Lille railway.

The 46th and 44th Brigades (Br.-Generals V. M. Fortune and N. A. Thomson) of the 15th Division had continued the advance at 6.30 a.m. They met with little opposition, the large agglomeration Epinoy–Carvin being found evacuated and no enemy in the Bois d'Epinoy, which was not a wood but a young plantation with wide rides. The advanced guard of the 46th Brigade reached the objective named in the 11 a.m. order at midnight. That of the 44th was on the original objective east of Carvin when, at 4.35 p.m., the 11 a.m. order reached the leading battalion; forty minutes later its companies were told that, owing to approaching darkness, it would be impossible to reach the objective and that they should halt at some mines about half-way to it.

[1] Warning order at 11 a.m; executive at 11.45 a.m.

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An hour later they were directed to stand fast where they were, which was about a thousand yards from their position at 4.35 p.m. Thus the 44th Brigade halted just east of Carvin, nearly 1½ miles behind the 46th.

The 47th Brigade (under Lieut.-Colonel W. E. Brown), the advanced guard of the 16th Division, took the southern part of Annoeulin without much opposition; but the townlet was soon deluged with mustard gas, and the main part set on fire by the Germans. The 9/Black Watch, which was leading, pushed on, and at 11 a.m. was east of Canin–Allennes, its original objective. Thence, later, it tried to reach the new objective and, being checked by fire from Camphin and Chemy, which formed part of it, halted; but during the night the battalion succeeded in entering both villages.

Coming to the III Corps, during the night of the 15th/16th, the 165th Brigade (Br.-General L. B. Boyd-Moss) of the 55th Division crossed the Haute Deule canal, and at 6 a.m. the 1/6th King's, passing through the 1/5th, continued towards the northern part of Annoeulin, which by then was clear of Germans. Two companies followed and drove them out of Allennes and occupied Herrin and les Anserœuilles, on the canal to the north-west. This brigade had about midday given assistance to the 164th (Br.-General C. I. Stockwell), held up on the canal owing to the resistance offered at Bac de Wavrin, by attacking the place in flank. This attack was successful and by 9 p.m. a bridge was thrown over the canal, its line made good and patrols pushed forward to the Seclin canal.

Patrols of the 230th Brigade (Br.-General A. A. Kennedy) of the 74th (Yeomanry) Division were able to reach the Haute Deule canal, but were driven back by the severity of the fire from the eastern bank; the 229th Brigade (Br.-General F. S. Thackeray), for the same reason, could not advance more than about a thousand yards.

The XI Corps did a little better against the Lille defences. The 142nd Brigade (Br.-General R. McDouall), covering the front of the 47th (2nd London) Division, in the course of the day fought its way forward a good mile to the line of the old Fort d'Englos, and the 178th Brigade (Br.-General T. W. Stansfeld) and the 176th Brigade (Br.-General T. G. Cope)

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of the 59th Division gained about two thousand yards, capturing a line of trenches running north through Capinghem past old Fort Senarmont (inclusive) to the Army boundary and gaining touch with the Second Army.

At 11 p.m. on the 16th the I Corps notified its divisions that they should at dawn push forward to the day's objective if it had not already been reached, and then send patrols forward to the next, only about two or three miles ahead, as Lille was still in the enemy's hands. This second objective was the high ground running north-west from Moncheaux to Thumeries and Phalempin, and thence along the Douai–Lille railway to the corps boundary.

The 58th Division started early on the 17th and met with practically no resistance; by midday its patrols were working through the Bois de l'Offlarde, and by evening its outposts were established on the railway up to Moncheaux and thence north-eastward to Bouvincourt and Mons en Pevèle, beyond the day's objective, contact being obtained with the Germans on the divisional left just beyond Mons en Pevèle and Vincourt.

The 15th Division, using the 45th Brigade (Lieut.-Colonel N. MacLeod, acting) as advanced guard, met with a little resistance from machine guns, and by noon on the right, and a little later on the left, reached the day's objectives. The brigade, by divisional orders, then pushed patrols forward to form before dusk an outpost line on high ground nearly two miles farther east, and this was duly performed.

The 47th Brigade of the 16th Division captured Phalempin and the railway north of the village during the morning after slight opposition, and in the evening established an outpost line about three thousand yards to the eastward.

In the III Corps, the 165th and 164th Brigades each sent forward a battalion. The Seclin canal, already outflanked on the north, was reached and crossed without opposition. On the right, patrols entered Seclin at 2.30 p.m.; Fort de Seclin was then taken by the 1/6th King's and two hours later, after some sharp fighting, Grand Ennetières (2½ miles beyond Seclin) also. On the left, the 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers came up abreast of the King's to Fort de Vendeville without any

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fighting; patrols sent 3½ miles farther east found a small garrison of about forty Germans in Sainghin, and remained all night watching them.

The 74th Division had still to cross the Haute Deule canal and thence work up a long gentle slope, the crest of which is roughly marked by the Pont à Marcq–Lille road, with the German defences beginning on the first rise, about the line Ancoisne–Emmerin. To the left front of the division were the small towns of Haubourdin and Loos, really suburbs of Lille. Major-General Girdwood's plan contemplated reaching a line just short of the Douai–Lille railway, through the western edges of Wattignies and l'Arbrisseau, and then north-westward through the centre of Loos.

The advance was begun at 6 a.m. Although the enemy had retired during the night and his artillery had been silent for some hours, machine guns continued to fire across the canal, but ceased about 4.30 a.m., and no resistance was encountered. The 15/Suffolk (230th Brigade) and 14/Black Watch and 16/Devonshire (229th Brigade) led, and they crossed the canal in file over the destroyed bridges or by improvised means. On the right the final objective was reached by 3 p.m., and on the left, with a shorter distance to go, soon after midday. The line of the Douai–Lille railway was then made good and outposts were pushed well beyond it, making the total advance over five miles.

For the occupation of Lille, the 172nd and 171st Brigades (Lieut.-Colonel M. E. Makgill-Crichton-Maitland, acting, and Br.-General G. Meynell) of the 57th Division, by XI Corps orders, passed through the 47th Division. Patrols sent forward at daylight encountered no opposition, and after three miles had been covered it was learnt that Lille had been evacuated. The plan of piqueting the entrances through the fortified enceinte was then taken in hand and by 7.45 p.m. the guarding of the western side had been completed, and by 11 p.m. that of the rest. Little military damage had been done in Lille beyond destroying the railway track which ran into the city, dropping a railway viaduct into the road and blowing up all the bridges but one over the moat; but many private houses had been damaged and property in them wantonly broken up. Subsequently, all the stations on the Lille–Tournai railway were found to be destroyed. The electric power station and gas works were intact, but the mains broken in many places. Booby

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traps had been prepared in the telephone exchange and other buildings, but with the help of willing prisoners they were easily made harmless by the engineers. The survivors of the inhabitants looked fit but thin, with their clothes hanging loose about them, but, as a medical officer said, the weaker vessels had died under the régime of semi-starvation from which the town had suffered for just four years. The Germans, however, had the humanity to leave six days' supplies behind for the inhabitants.

North of Lille the 59th Division advanced unopposed, and by evening was aligned on the Basse Deule.

The day had been a most successful one, the general advance of the Fifth Army, over low-lying water-logged country had been about five miles, the Haute Deule canal had been crossed and Lille had been liberated without fighting and without serious damage.

At 7.45 p.m. the Fifth Army headquarters announced in orders that the Second Army was proceeding to encircle Tourcoing and Roubaix, the great daughter towns to the north-east of Lille and that there was reason to believe that the enemy was withdrawing to the east of the Schelde, which river, with Tournai on it, was the ultimate objective. A line about a mile beyond the Orchies–Cysoing–Lannoy railway, 5½ miles ahead, was given as the next objective, the advance of the main bodies of the divisions beginning when the leading troops of the III and XI Corps had effected junction east of Lille. The general policy laid down was an advance by bounds from one position to another, any of which could, if necessary, be held as a battle position by the main body of each division. This procedure may have been over-cautious, but the Fifth Army was weak for its frontage, and its business was to hold the gap between the Groups of Armies to the south and north.

On the 18th, a cold and misty day with heavy fog in the early morning, visibility was poor, and no destructive shoots on enemy batteries with aeroplane observation were attempted, harassing fire was, however, carried out as on previous days. Several successful air reconnaissances were made.

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and the roads east of Tressin (half-way between Lille and Tournai) were reported full of troops marching eastward. At 12.30 p.m. a low-flying attack was made on Tournai by three squadrons. A general advance of about three miles was made, but the Army objective, the north-south Orchies–Lannoy railway, was reached only in one sector, where it ran on the western side of the la Marque stream. About 7.30 a.m. each division sent forward one or two strong columns on the roads, which covered their advance by patrols.[1] Limited visibility and the many small woods and localities which had to be searched made progress slow, and whenever the enemy opened fire, further time was lost in deploying; but by 11 a.m. it was evident that the enemy's rear guards, which had moved back about an hour and a half earlier, were halted on a line about two and a half miles ahead: Sauvagerie–Broderie, thence, a little west of north, to Ennevelin and along the eastern bank of the la Marque, a stream which, below Péronne, is eight feet or more deep and 20 to 30 feet wide.

The 58th and 15th Divisions of the I Corps drove the Germans out of their position and occupied it; the 16th went a little beyond this and reached the Orchies–Lille railway. The right wing, the 165th Brigade, of the 55th Division (III Corps), reached the la Marque by 1 p.m. and halted, as the 164th Brigade, the left wing, could not get on; The latter found the line of the la Marque strongly defended, Péronne under enemy shell-fire and Bas Sainghin obstinately held, so that it was not cleared until the afternoon. Waiting until night, which was light with a full moon, patrols of the 164th Brigade tried to cross the la Marque on ladders: in the first attempt the ladders broke and some men were nearly drowned; but the second attempt succeeded, and the enemy was machine-gunned and shelled out of Bouvines, and a line established on the railway beyond, with patrols in Cysoing.

[1] Thus the 58th Division detailed two columns; that formed by the 175th Brigade consisted of:

Advanced Guard: 1 cyclist platoon, 1 battalion, 1 section R.E., 1 section R.F.A.

Main Body: 1 battalion, 1 battery (less a section), 1 battalion, brigade headquarters, 1 company machine guns, 1 light trench-mortar battery, followed by 1 brigade R.F.A. (less a battery).

Some advanced guards had with them a section of Tunnellers R.E. to deal with delay-action charges and booby traps, and in most cases the main body moved in two echelons as a precaution against air attack.

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The 231st Brigade (Br.-General C. E. Heathcote) of the 74th Division found the machine-gun defenders of Sainghin assisted by a field battery, and they resisted stoutly; although the village was cleared during the morning, it was dusk before the Germans were driven out of the wood beyond and across the la Marque, and all the bridges being destroyed they could not be followed. The 229th Brigade, on the left, turned German patrols out of Ascq, and then came under machine-gun fire from the embankment of the Orchies–Lannoy railway. By 3 p.m. the enemy was driven from this; patrols, however, could not approach the la Marque. The 57th Division (XI Corps) not being up, a defensive left flank was formed, as had been foreseen would be necessary.

The 57th Division had occupied the inner defences of Lille (less the northern sector), Lieut.-General Haking, commanding the XI Corps, making a formal entry and handing over his corps flag to be placed on the group of statuary representing Lille in the Place de la Concorde, Paris. The 171st Brigade was, however, sent on through the southern suburbs of Lille to join in the general advance, and it managed to reach Ascq–Annappes on the left of the 74th Division. The Army commander, General Sir William Birdwood, made his formal entry into Lille on the 28th, at the head of the 47th Division, he also handing his flag over to the Maire.

On the extreme left of the Fifth Army the 59th Division, on the 18th, secured the northern sector of the inner defences of Lille, crossing the Basse Deule on bridges thrown by the divisional engineers. As the line of the la Marque was approached, machine-gun opposition was encountered, with heavy gas shelling in the centre near Fort des Marchenelles. Several patrols managed to cross the stream, but they were withdrawn at night and outposts established on the western bank. Enemy shelling, with some gas, continued most of the night.

Reports of escaped and liberated civilians showed that the German defences on the west bank of the Schelde were very poor, but that churches and other large buildings were prepared for demolition and the bridges, except a few temporary footbridges, all down. The obstacle ahead was formidable. The valley of the Schelde near Tournai is wide and flat. On the western side low hills extend to the faubourgs of the city and thence southwards, cut into by

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long valley, in which runs the Orchies–Tournai railway, and which extends almost to the banks of the river at Antoing. The highest parts of these hills are marked by Mont de la Justice, west of Antoing, the wood south-west of St. Maur and the Reservoir W.S.W. of Tournai. Southward of Antoing the hills recede westwards towards Taintignies, with a spur extending into that village on which lies the wooded area of which the Bois de Flines forms part, with a swell of ground near Maulde, on which a fort stands. On the eastern side of the Schelde a semicircle of hills of about four miles radius, extends round Tournai from Antoing northwards and back to the river near Havron, whence a slight rise of ground runs northward with Mont St. Aubert,[1] about four hundred feet above the river level, overlooking the country around. Otherwise the country is nearly dead flat and so bare, except for villages, hedges and small woods near the villages, as almost to preclude movement under fire by day.

The Schelde canal, which mostly follows the river channel, is 40 yards wide and about 18 feet deep, with a muddy bottom many feet deep ; it had numerous irrigation channels and marshes on its banks, mostly inundated, so that a considerable watery area had to be crossed.

Between Tournai and Pecq there was only one permanent road bridge, across the river at Chin, and that had been destroyed ; across the watery wastes there were no roads, only footpaths.

The operations of the 19th October were similar to those of the 18th : with the difference that an average advance of about five miles was made, and that the line reached, except on the extreme right where touch with the First Army was maintained, was beyond the original objective, a line about two thousand yards beyond the Orchies–Lannoy railway, designed on the left to be far enough from the la Marque to preclude enemy observation into its valley. The German rear guards slipped away in the early hours of the morning, contact took place at only a very few places, and little resistance was offered. Owing to continued unfavourable weather, only a small amount of air reconnaissance and bombing was possible.

[1] Its summit is 3,000 yards east of Havron. See Sketch 40.

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was carried out. The march of the 171st Brigade of the 57th Division was accomplished without incident, and it made contact with the 74th Division north of Hertain. The 178th Brigade of the 59th Division found the ground between the la Marque and Forest a mass of water channels, and practically under water, and had to deal with many machine guns and snipers, which, although they retired, kept up fire most of the day. Willems was reached at 10 a.m. only fifteen minutes after the enemy had left the village. When, by divisional orders, the advance was resumed at 3.30 p.m., opposition on the right continued, but the brigade continued on its way until it came up abreast of the 171st (57th Division). The 176th Brigade (59th), on the left of the 178th, encountered no opposition.

It was on the 19th October that Maréchal Foch issued his last General Directive, already mentioned,[1] which in paragraph (2) defined the direction of the further advance of the British Fourth, Third and First and Fifth Armies, Pecq (on the Schelde, 6 miles north of Tournai)–Lessines (on the Dendre) and Hal (12 miles to the south of Brussels) being given as the northern boundary of the Fifth Army.

On the 20th there was no enemy air activity, and British aircraft fired on various ground targets. The resistance offered by the enemy was again slight, except on the left, which was already within three miles of the Schelde, the right wing being double that distance from it. The general advance, which began in most corps at 8 a.m., was about three miles; thus the two right divisions were short of the second objective defined on the previous day, the three centre divisions were upon it and the two left divisions a little beyond it.

The 175th Brigade of the 58th Division by midday reached a line selected by the commander of the I Corps, a mile or so beyond the first objective, without resistance, and at 2 p.m. went on a mile farther and then halted, its patrols reporting that the bridge over the Rivière d'Elmar, at Pont Caillou, was blown up. The 173rd was delayed by

[1] See p. 324

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fire from a small village on its left front, and did not come up abreast of the 175th, with the large Bois de Flines in front of it, until evening, and then also halted.

The 46th Brigade, leading the 15th Division, meeting no enemy fire until late in the day, was able to push on to very nearly the second objective, actually up to it on the left; but as the Bois de Flines lay on the right, and the time was 10 p.m. before its western edge was reached, no attempt was made to go farther.

The leading battalion of the 47th Brigade of the 16th Division met with slight opposition at Rumes, a mile from the start, but had entered the village at 10.25 a.m., and by 11 a.m. was on the first objective. Half an hour later the outposts were engaged by two motor machine-gun cars, which soon fell back, and, on fresh orders, the advanced guard continued on to the second objective, which was reached by 3.30 p.m.

The 165th and 164th Brigades of the 55th Division started at 9 a.m. and 8.45 a.m., respectively. The former was fired on from Froidmont, where the 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers captured a divisional ammunition column of 58 wagons, 48 limbers and other vehicles; but both brigades reached the second objective, except on the extreme left, just before midday. Patrols attempting to proceed farther came under heavy fire and were checked. Attacks made during the night against the ridge on the left front held by the enemy resulted in its capture with 18 prisoners and three machine guns.

By the narrowing of the front of the 74th Division as it approached Tournai, the 231st Brigade was in the course of the day squeezed out, and the 229th Brigade took over the whole divisional front. It was intended, should the second objective be gained without serious opposition, to secure the bridges over the Schelde at once, and arrangements similar to those employed at Lille were made for piqueting Tournai. But when, about 5.30 p.m., the 229th Brigade was approaching Orcq, the enemy on the high ground to west and north-west prevented farther progress, and a line about a mile short of the village was occupied.

The 171st Brigade and attached troops in the 57th Division sector[1] found a large ammunition dump in Blandain burning,

[1] The corps orders for the advance were, it is recorded, received by telephone at 1.45 a.m.; the written orders did not arrive until 7.46 a.m.

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and encountered small enemy patrols, both mounted and on foot; but, brushing them away, they reached the second objective west of Froyennes by midday, and, the 59th Division not being up, then halted, its patrols soon discovering that the enemy in front was still holding on.

The 178th and 176th Brigades of the 59th Division, which had the XI Corps mounted troops in divisional reserve, owing to delay in orders reaching them,[1] did not start until 10 a.m. They experienced considerable shelling directed on small woods and roads, and machine-gun fire from the Tournai–Tourcoing railway, and again after it was crossed. There was also much sniping, so that all woods and buildings had to be searched; but in the end the enemy parties were driven from the western bank of the Schelde, and the field artillery was able to fire on the temporary bridges. In spite of this fire, the enemy, protected by barrages managed to destroy them, and the Pont à Chin bridge being already down, only the railway bridge just north of Tournai remained. It was impossible, therefore, to follow up. North of Tournai, indeed, the Schelde, seen from the high ground west of the town, presented a wide waste of water eastward of the stream, nearly a mile wide. A line commanding the valley was therefore occupied, with posts pushed forward to the river bank.

Thus by the end of the 20th, the left of the XI Corps, the northern wing of the Fifth Army, had reached the Schelde, but the remainder of that corps, and the I and III Corps, on its right, were still some way west of the river.

Owing to the contraction of the Army frontage, General Birdwood directed that the I Corps (15th, 16th and 58th Divisions) should henceforward operate with two divisions in front line, and the third close in reserve; and the III Corps (55th and 74th Divisions) and XI Corps (47th, 57th and 59th Divisions) each on a front of one division; but this arrangement, owing to reduced strengths, could not be put into effect.

During the next two days, the 21st and 22nd October, determined efforts were made to close up to the Schelde and

[1] Divisional orders were not issued until 3.15 a.m. and brigade orders not until 5 hours later.

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to establish bridgeheads north and south of Tournai; but no more than patrols were able to cross the river. On the right, on the 21st the bridge over the Elmar at Pont Caillou was repaired, and in the early morning the advanced guard of the 175th Brigade of the 58th Division, starting at 7.30 a.m., went forward more than two miles, but was then checked by fire from the Fort de Maulde; the 173rd Brigade was able to push on and establish posts on the west bank of the Schelde by 10.30 a.m., the houses of Bleharies and Espain affording good cover, but any movement near the river immediately brought down a heavy concentration of artillery and trench-mortar fire. During the night the 504th Field Company R.E. constructed a footbridge close to the destroyed road bridge at Espain, but patrols were unable to cross.

The 15th Division against slight opposition gained a good position at Lesdain and northwards, and its forward troops reached the edge of the inundated area near the Schelde, of crossing which there seemed little prospect.

The 16th, 55th and 74th Divisions, against considerable opposition, pushed forward to the position overlooking Tournai to which they had been ordered, but were unable to go much farther. The German artillery showed increased activity during both day and night, and henceforward both here and elsewhere the advanced troops, as well as the roads and villages in rear, were freely shelled. Prisoners and civilians provided a good deal of information as to the defences of Tournai, and declared that two days previously a divisional order had been read to the *4th Ersatz Division*, which with the *2nd Guard Reserve Division* was charged with the defence, that the town was to be held at all costs.

The leading troops of the 57th and 59th Divisions, already close to the Schelde, met with very determined opposition, and, though well supported by divisional artillery and by some counter-battery work, could make little progress, owing to fire from a convent, over which the Red Cross flag was flying, and its enclosures. In the 59th Division three men of the 36/Northumberland Fusiliers (178th Brigade) managed to cross by the destroyed bridge at Pont à Chin, but a passage by daylight in any strength was out of the question. An officer of the 11/R. Scots Fusiliers (178th Brigade) also crossed by the ruins of the bridge and fastened a strong telephone wire to an enemy floating bridge lying alongside the eastern bank, fifty yards upstream. It

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was gradually pulled into position and several men crossed by it; but an enemy light signal soon brought down heavy artillery fire on Pont à Chin. A chain lying between steps on each bank of the river was discovered at Esquelmes and a ferry was rigged up with a pontoon; but the men of the 25/King's (176th Brigade) who crossed could not proceed far over the marshy ground on the eastern bank, in which they were waist deep in water. Contact was made with the Second Army at Pecq, as ordered, after some confusion, as it turned out that a second Pecq existed in the same neighbourhood, three quarters of a mile west of Bailleul. A combined post of the 176th Brigade (59th Division) and the 93rd Brigade (31st Division) was organized at the junction of the two Armies.

Artillery was very active on both sides on the 22nd, and, most of the corps heavy artillery having come up, a good deal of counter-battery work was carried out. The 175th Brigade, the right of the 58th Division, tried to advance in conjunction with the 12th Division (First Army),[1] but was again stopped by fire from the Fort de Maulde. In the 173rd Brigade sector, covered by the fire of a field battery and machine guns, a patrol of the 2/24th London, at 5.30 a.m., crossed by the footbridge thrown at Espain, but found the enemy in strength and withdrew; two companies of the 2/2nd London tried but failed to cross on rafts, made by the 504th Field Company R.E., of barrels and floorboards taken from a brewery in Bleharies, as pontoons had been found too vulnerable. Rafts, too, proved more serviceable than footbridges, as they could be drawn up on the western bank and concealed during the day, whilst bridges were constantly being damaged. Br.-General Corkran gathered sufficient information to be able to report that the Bleharies–Cin road, the only west-east communication, ran on a high embankment: north of it the country was swampy and impassable for infantry; south of it, close observation was hampered by hedges and small woods: Cin itself was held and commanded a field of fire of a thousand yards to the west and north: before the Schelde could be crossed the enemy must be driven from Maulde and its fort, his guns silenced and Cin screened by smoke. Enemy shelling drove the support battalion of the 173rd Brigade in Bleharies back to Rongy.

[1] See p. 348–9.

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The situation of the 15th and 16th Divisions remained unchanged. Patrols found that Bruyelle, which lay at the junction of their front line, still contained many Germans. Local civilians and others who had escaped by crossing the Schelde north of Tournai reported that many churches and the cathedral of the town were mined, and that the civilians in Tournai were being evacuated, and they gave the position of certain heavy guns.

The 55th and 74th Divisions tried in vain to improve their position. At 4.30 a.m. the 1/5th South Lancashire (166th Brigade) attacked a château and a mill about a thousand yards from its front, but though it reached its objectives it could not stay in them. At 4.30 p.m. the 1/4th L. North Lancashire (164th Brigade), after a bombardment, took a small wood at the western end of the Faubourg St. Martin with 18 prisoners and 4 machine guns; the attackers were driven out at 2 a.m. (23rd), but recovered their position, only to be shelled and gassed and, as mist delayed reinforcements, forced out again at 4 a.m. An attempt of the 14/ Black Watch (229th Brigade) to reach the Ere–Orcq road was brought to a stop by belts of wire commanded by machine guns.

In the XI Corps, the 171st Brigade (57th Division) at 4.30 a.m. found Froyennes evacuated, and after a little firing the enemy's rear guard left the Convent, so that platoon posts could be established on the Tournai–Pont à Chin road; but they could go no farther. Although the enemy kept up a brisk fire from the eastern bank, none of his troops could be found on the western, except on the extreme right where, about 3.30 p.m., two prisoners were taken. In the 170th Brigade (57th Division), which had temporarily taken the place of the 178th Brigade (59th Division), strong patrols of the 2/4th L. North Lancashire and the 2/5th King's Own got across the river by rafts and a barrel-pier bridge at Pont à Chin, and formed a line on the eastern bank opposite Paradis about 8 a.m., in spite of machine-gun and trench-mortar fire. The North Lancashire were reinforced by a company; but as the ground was too marshy for digging, at 1 p.m. a retirement was made to the western bank. The patrols of the King's Own also returned. All attempts of those of the 176th Brigade (59th Division) to cross the river were prevented by hot rifle and machine-gun fire.

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Between the 23rd and 31st October no change of any importance took place in the situation of the Fifth Army, but a little ground was gained on the extreme flanks; patrol work and reconnaissance continued, preparations for bridging the Schelde and for the advance of mobile columns beyond it were carried on, and many instructions issued. The most interesting of the last, which came from G.H.Q., dealt with the necessity as the Armies advanced of picking up and carrying forward such installations as pumping stations, telephone exchanges and electric-light plant, including waterpipes and cable: they would not be required in the back areas, nor could men be left behind to work them, and fresh material was not available. Even the transportable Hopkins steel-lattice bridges for heavy traffic in back areas had to be dismantled and carried forward to replace the many bridges which the Germans had damaged or destroyed.

On the 24th orders were received that a Portuguese battalion would be attached to each brigade of the III and XI Corps.[1]

There were many rumours of an enemy retirement, possibly twenty miles back to the Dendre, which seemed to be confirmed by explosions and fires in Tournai and in some of the villages on the 24th and 25th; but on the 28th a copy of an order was captured, dated 19th October, by General von Larisch (*LIV Corps, Second Army*, opposite the British Third Army). It stated that Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group of Armies would accept decisive battle on the Lys–Hermann Line, which must be held at all costs. This meant the Germans were going to stand on the Schelde.[2]

Against considerable enemy opposition in the Tournai–Mons–Ath area, the work of the X Brigade R.A.F. was directed principally to ranging for the artillery, reconnoitring enemy troop and train movements, which were slight, reporting the existence or absence of bridges, and bombing batteries and railways. On the 29th all the squadrons of the 80th Wing made a combined attack on Renaix aerodrome (15 miles north-east of Tournai) with good results.

[1] The Portuguese Corps was in the XI Corps back area; it had not fought since April 1918, but some of the artillery and engineers were attached to British formations.

[2] See End-paper B.

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To summarize the operations: on the 23rd October, on the extreme right, the 175th Brigade (58th Division) managed to push another five hundred yards nearer to Fort de Maulde; on the 26th at 4 a.m. patrols of the 9/London, on the left, reached Maulde village; and at 9 a.m., after several attempts to enter the fort, the 10/London found it evacuated and occupied it, although the enemy kept up a brisk fire on it all day; with a view of blocking the Valenciennes–Tournai road, the church and a large number of the houses in Maulde had been shaken down by trench-mortar bombs placed in the cellars, but the débris was only a few inches deep at the worst places. One patrol of the 173rd Brigade managed to cross the Schelde on rafts and went almost as far as Cin. During the night of the 29th/30th a company of the 7/London (174th Brigade) crossed the Scarpe by means of a pontoon ferry, seized the Château de Montagne and took all but the north-eastern corner of le Fort.

On the left flank on the 23rd, the 59th Division established posts on the eastern bank east and south of Esquelmes; on the 26th a patrol occupied the Cabaret Liétard, and on the night of the 31st October/1st November its troops cleared the enemy out of the loop just south of Cabaret Liétard. The men of the 59th Division had shown such gallantry during the operations near the Schelde, that the corps commander, in recognition of it, directed that it should no longer be referred to as a "B", that is second class division.[1]

The Fifth Army was now, like the First and Second on its flanks, lined up on the Schelde ready for the next combined general offensive. The sequence of the great allied attacks, by Armies, was as follows:

first, on the left, on the 31st October, the Flanders Group of Armies, to which the Second Army belonged, and the Fifth Army;

[1] The 59th (2nd North Midland) Division, then in the Third Army, lost 6,038 men in the March offensive, was sent to the Second Army for rest, and lost 2,363 men in the Lys offensive. It was reduced to training cadre and reconstituted as a 2nd Line division and made up to strength with Garrison Guard battalions, and employed in the construction of defences. In June it was reconstituted as a Garrison division and underwent training to fit it to hold a sector of the line, and on 25th July took over a sector of the VI Corps (Third Army); on the 21st–22nd August, it was engaged in the Battle of Albert, and was subsequently transferred to the XI Corps (Fifth Army).

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secondly, on the right, on the 1st November, the American First Army and the Fourth and Fifth French Armies, whilst, in the left centre, part of the British Third Army (XVII Corps) and First Army (XXII and Canadian Corps), moved forward south of Valenciennes to turn the German forces holding the line of the Schelde; thirdly, in the right centre, on the 4th November, the British Fourth, Third and First Armies, in concert with the French First Army on their right.

The operations will be dealt with in that order.

NOTE

The Railway Situation at the end of October[1]

The repair and relaying of the permanent way had kept pace fairly well with the advance; but the provision of railheads and points at which the railways could deliver the bulk of the traffic had not done so. The explosion of delay-action mines, air attacks on junctions, occasional shelling, and accidents all contributed to delays, and the movements of trains over hastily reconstructed lines without the machinery for safe and regular working led to a fair crop of accidents.

The Fourth Army had a number of makeshift railheads on the north-south railway St. Quentin–Busigny–Cambrai; but the bulk of the traffic had to be dealt with on the St. Quentin–Epehy–Cambrai line, 15 miles farther west and twenty to twenty-five miles behind the front.

The other Armies were better provided. The Third Army had railheads on two lines running out of Cambrai, one E.S.E. towards Bertry and Busigny, and the other east to Rieux, about six miles on the way to Solesmes; but the number of trains which could be worked over them depended on the Marcoing–Cambrai line, which was not doubled until the 7th November.

The First Army had the north-south Cambrai–Iwuy–Lourches (just short of Denain) single line, and behind it the Marquion–Somain single line.

The Fifth Army had two east-west lines, the Arras–Douai–Somain line, extended to Valenciennes by the 5th November, and the La Bassée–Lille line, extended as a single line about three miles east of Lille (doubled by the 8th November).

[1] A detailed account of reconstruction will be found in "Transportation". See Sketch 20.

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The reconstruction of railways in the Second Army area presented grave difficulties and required a very large amount of labour for long periods, as the surface of the recovered area east and south-east of Ypres had been thoroughly churned up during the battles of the previous four years. By the 30th October the single Douve valley line, Bailleul–Menin, had been re-opened to Courtrai, with short lengths to the south towards Tournai (not reached until the 14th November) and on the North towards Ingleminster (reached on the 2nd November). Five miles behind Courtrai–Ingleminster was the north-south line Menin–Roulers, the latter place (in the Belgian area) fed by the Ypres–Roulers line, which by the 22nd October had been extended to Ingleminster.

For the further advance eastward it was arranged to develop as main feeder lines for the British Armies:

1. St. Quentin–Busigny–Aulnoye–Maubeuge.
2. Valenciennes–Mons.
3. Lille–Tournai–Ath.
4. Courtrai–Audenarde.

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CHAPTER XXVII

Between the Lys and the Schelde

The Second Army

20th–27th October

Action of Ooteghem, 25th October

(Sketches 23, 32)

The watershed between the Schelde and the Lys[1] over which the Second Army had now to cross is a long flattish ridge, with its axis nearer to the Schelde than the Lys, dotted with farms and labourers' cottages, each with its garden and cellar. This ridge has many spurs on both sides; so from south-west to north-east the ground presents a series of small rises, some of them of sufficient military importance to be themselves called ridges. It is traversed by the Bossuyt–Courtrai canal, on whose north-eastern side are a number of streams, then in flood, and their vicinity, particularly between Courtrai and Deerlyck, was marshy; but the whole surface, owing to recent heavy rains, was heavy going.

The Germans had planned a switch position between the Lys Position and the Hermann Position which from near Herinnes (on the Tournai–Berchem railway) ran north-eastwards parallel to the Schelde. The front line of this switch apparently ran from near Helchin on the Schelde northward to Harlebeke on the Lys, with the Bossuyt–Courtrai canal, which was found to be wired on both banks, as a second line[2]. During the 20th most of the divisions,

[1] See Sketch 32.

[2] Ludendorff (p. 698) merely says the position ran "east of Courtrai" and then along the upper reaches of the Schelde". Rupprecht (ii, p. 465) speaks of the "Lys–Hermann Position" (which included the Switch) and the "Schelde–Hermann Position".

Regimental histories do not define the line of the Switch, which they call the "Courtrai Switch", but speak of subsidiary switches, one of which was parallel to and east of the Gaverbeek. The right of the Switch position would seem to have been at Harlebeke station ("Regt. No. 104", p. 393) and its left near Bossuyt ("Regt. No. 88", p. 427). "Regt. No. 10", p. 208 states that the Switch was constructed by engineers and prisoners of war.

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except those of the XV Corps on the right, reported coming upon heavily wired trenches, no doubt at least the beginnings of a very deep position. But the existence of a carefully sited and partly wired position in front of the Second Army does not seem to have been realized—at any rate, no mention of such a thing can be found.[1] Thus, it happened that no organized preparations were made to deal with it, and the divisions advanced without adequate artillery support as if there were merely rear guards to be brushed aside. Unfortunately, the R.A.F. was not able to render much assistance: "the work of the air squadrons, after the opening "day of the battle [14th October] was curtailed by bad "weather until a temporary improvement on the 1st "November".[2]

The Army objective was the Schelde, but the corps, employing as a rule only advanced guards, gave lines short of this: the XV Corps, a line about two thousand yards from it, but the river was reached; the X Corps was content with the railway about three thousand yards from the Schelde, but only the right reached this objective; the XIX, selected Kreupel ridge, about three miles south-east of Courtrai, but this was taken and passed; and the II Corps named a line about three miles ahead, and nearly reached it except on the left, where, as its French neighbours did not start until 3 p.m., it had to hold back in order to avoid exposing a flank.

The 31st and 14th Divisions of the XV Corps, in whose area the Courtrai Switch did not exist, using the 93rd and 43rd Brigades (Br.-Generals G. B. F. Smyth and G. E. Pereira), started at 7 a.m. and reached a line close and parallel to the Schelde with only slight opposition, the enemy machine-gunners not waiting until the troops came within effective ranges. At night, however, the Germans shelled, machine-gunned, trench-mortared and sniped the forward positions, from the east bank and gassed the rear areas until after midnight, and then kept up harassing fire. Both sides of the river were found to be wired; and, as the

[1] The Weekly Summary of Information of the 21st October mentions: "In Flanders there is no evidence from photographs of any existing rear "lines of defence, but work is reported by civilians between the Lys and "Schelde rivers".

[2] "War in the Air" vi, p. 534.

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ground near it was marshy and flooded, patrols, except at one place, had difficulty in getting to the bank.

The 30th Division now covered the whole frontage of the X Corps, the 34th Division becoming reserve, and it sent forward the 90th and 21st Brigades (Br.-Generals G. A. Stevens and G. W. Goodman). They employed, respectively, one battalion and two battalions as advanced guards. Starting at 7.30 a.m., the advance to the Helchin–Bossuyt road, a little short of the Schelde, was to be made in five bounds. The 2/London Scottish (90th Brigade) reached the railway, without much difficulty, but then came under incessant machine-gun fire and increasing gun-fire, and by 3.30 p.m. were brought to a standstill. It was intended to renew the advance as soon as darkness provided cover, and patrols then actually reached the Helchin road (the village was held by the enemy). The situation on the left, however, where the 21st Brigade was not up and the flank completely exposed, led to the operation being abandoned, but touch was obtained with the XV Corps on the right.

The 21st Brigade had soon run into the enemy on the Ruddervoorde spur; the resistance of his outposts there was overcome, but behind them he held the St. Genois spur (part of the Courtrai Switch), strongly protected by wire, and the intervening ground between the spurs was swept by machine guns; artillery too of all calibres from 77 mm. to 8-inch soon joined in. Thus all progress was stopped until dark, when some ground was gained by a charge.[1]

The XIX Corps sent forward the 35th Division (Major-General A. H. Marindin), the 41st waiting in reserve in and around Courtrai, and the attack was made at 7 a.m. by the 104th and 105th Brigades (Br.-Generals J. W. Sandilands and A. J. Turner), each of which deployed all three battalions, the starting line being on the Beekstraat spur, two thousand yards south-east of Courtrai. No barrage was fired, but each battalion had a section of field guns attached to it. Serious resistance was soon encountered: the 104th Brigade and the right battalion of the 105th were brought to a standstill for some time at the Keibeek, and it was 1.30 p.m. before that stream was crossed; the 15/Sherwood Foresters (105th Brigade) fought its way into Sweveghem, but was

[1] The exact position of the 21st Brigade cannot be determined, as neither its diary nor those of its battalions afford any clue.

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turned out and held up until about 3 p.m.; the 4/North Staffordshire had hard fighting to take Blokken, where it captured two 15-cm. howitzers which had been in action at three or four hundred yards. Information came back slowly, but about 11 a.m. it became evident to Major-General Marindin that the Kreupel ridge, beyond the Keibeek, was strongly held—it was part of the Courtrai Switch — and he sent orders for it to be shelled until 12 noon, and again, heavy artillery taking part, from 1.15 to 1.30 p.m. He then went forward with the C.R.A. to confer with his brigade commanders.

About 1.30 p.m. a slackening of the enemy's fire became noticeable, and the 104th and 105th Brigades got on the move again. Leaving them to capture Kreupel ridge, Major-General Marindin, at 2.30 p.m., decided to send the 106th Brigade, then in support behind the Beekstraat ridge, by a flank march down the Courtrai–Ruddervoorde road to attack Hoogstraatje ridge, which lies east of Kreupel ridge, from the south-west, as this would serve to lessen the resistance from the latter and lead to the clearing of the ground between the two ridges.

The flank attack was to be made at 5.15 p.m. under a barrage of all available artillery creeping from south to north; but, owing to heavy rain and unforeseen difficulties of the road, it was not until 8.15 p.m. that the leading battalion, the 12/Highland L.I., followed by the 18/Highland L.I., having reached Muysbond Chapel, began to move along the Hoogstraatje ridge. It was soon checked by machine-gun fire from two farms which were protected by strong wire. The officer commanding the 12/Highland L.I. asked that they should be shelled. This was done, but it was not until about 4.30 a.m. (21st) that the two battalions were established on the ridge. Meantime at 2 a.m. (21st) the third battalion, the 17/Royal Scots, forming on the left of the brigade, had moved on Hoogstraatje from the west and found the village unoccupied. A patrol sent northwards towards the canal was fired on; but the enemy posts were driven off and the line extended to the canal.

The renewed attack on Kreupel ridge at 5.15 p.m. by the 104th and 105th Brigades had made slow progress; at 11.15 p.m. the bombardment was repeated for 15 minutes and then the objective, except some large farm buildings at the northern end, was secured. It was not until 4 a.m.

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that the 15/Sherwood Foresters captured these buildings. Thus both Kreupel and Hoogstraatje ridges had been won by the XIX Corps and the Courtrai Switch broken through. But as the canal divided the terrain into two parts success south of it could not greatly help to clear the enemy off the main ridge (Hoogmolen–Ooteghem–Ingoyghem–Anseghem).

The II Corps employed all three of its divisions for this purpose; they were handicapped by their artillery being on the western bank of the Lys, so that the barrage could not cover the advance for more than about two thousand five hundred yards, and further by the very heavy going, the country being waterlogged, even marshy south of Deerlyck, and intersected by dykes. The attack was made at 6 a.m. in mist, the objective being Pont Levis No. 2 on the Bossuyt–Courtrai canal—St. Louis–Vichte–Klein Haarlebeke, about three miles ahead. Resistance was slight at first, but, as usual, gradually stiffened.

The 29th Division (Major-General D. E. Cayley) sent forward the 88th Brigade (Br.-General B. C. Freyberg), which put two battalions into the front line. Staceghem was taken by 7.30 a.m., most of the Germans here throwing away their arms and equipment and fleeing: only about thirty in a post north of the village held out for a time. By 9.20 a.m. Esscher on the canal was reached and a line consolidated running north-east; by 1 p.m. the left was in St. Louis. Heavy machine-gun fire then prevented further progress. Divisional orders had been issued at 11.40 a.m. for the 86th Brigade (Br.-General G. R. H. Cheape) to pass through the 88th and continue the advance, and at 4.15 p.m. it was reported to be on the Pont Levis No. 2–St. Louis line, and soon after it secured a footing on the Wolfsberg in the centre. No further progress could be made, the Germans being on higher ground no doubt in the Courtrai Switch, with guns firing at short range; so the line gained by the 86th Brigade was consolidated.

The attack of the 9th Division was launched by the 26th and 28th Brigades (Br.-Generals Hon. A. G. A. Hore-Ruthven and J. L. Jack), each deploying two battalions. On the right the objective was easily reached about 11 a.m., when unreported marshy ground impeded progress. The left, on which flank the 1/1st Yorkshire Dragoons (2nd Cyclist Regiment) co-operated, was on the objective nearly an hour

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earlier. Major-General Tudor, who came up to Deerlyck, now ordered that the advance of both brigades should be continued to the Schelde at 12.30 p.m. under a barrage, as six brigades of field artillery were crossing the Lys and by noon would be in action to cover the front, whilst long-range guns would keep roads and railways under fire. The enemy had been shelling the banks of the Lys during the morning, and soon after 11 a.m. turned all calibres on to the St. Louis–Vichte Line. A good deal of enfilade fire, too, came from the Wolfsberg, not yet captured by the 29th Division; the support battalion ordered forward to resume the attack was late and missed the barrage; so stiff fighting ensued and little progress was made; indeed, after dark, as the 36th Division was not up, the left wing was withdrawn from in front of Vichte.

In the 36th Division, now on the left of the II Corps, the two battalions of the 107th Brigade which had begun crossing the Lys at 2 a.m. were in position in time for the 6 a.m. attack, and passed through the right of the 109th, whose left was still unable to turn the Germans out of the hornets' nest of Dries. In spite of machine-gun fire, the Courtrai–Ghent railway was crossed by the 107th Brigade by 8 a.m. and the Deerlyck–Waereghem road an hour later. There, as the brigade was beyond the zone of the artillery barrage, further advance proved difficult; but during the night the Gaverbeek was reached. At 12.30 p.m. the 1/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers (109th Brigade) made another unsuccessful effort to capture Dries, and then, by brigade orders, no further attempt was made until the French advanced on the left at 3 p.m.; but, as the French did not come quite abreast, junction being made with them at Leikant, Dries remained in the enemy's hands. The unexpected resistance from the Courtrai Switch had prevented the II Corps from advancing as far as expected.

The following day, the 21st October, brought only partial success to the Second Army: the X Corps joined the XV Corps on the western bank of the Schelde, but the two left corps made small progress; the divisions of the II Corps hung back because the French on their left made little way, and the left of the XIX waited for the II Corps, although its right pushed on to ensure touch with the X Corps. The day was showery, so that ground conditions did not improve; identifications of regiments obtained on the 20th

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disclosed a considerable amount of disorganization on the enemy's side, and from statements made by prisoners and civilians it appeared that little or no defensive preparations had been made on the line of the Schelde : one prisoner had heard the G.O.C. *12th Bavarian Division* tell some officers that they were to hold the Schelde until the 23rd October, and then retire about three miles to higher ground.

The situation of the XV Corps remained unchanged. After midnight 20th/21st enemy artillery fire practically ceased, which might be taken as the beginning of a withdrawal ; but on the other hand all attempts at bridging the Schelde failed under harassing fire of snipers and machine guns.

The orders to the 30th Division (Major-General W. de L. Williams) of the X Corps were to clear the enemy from the western bank of the Schelde, and at 8.30 a.m. the 89th Brigade (Br.-General R. A. M. Currie), passing through the 90th, with the 21st Brigade, in the line, sent forward advanced guards. That of the former met with some opposition near Helchin, and then fire from the eastern bank of the Schelde ; but Helchin was occupied by 2.30 p.m., the garrison having crossed the river on rafts, after blowing up the bridge, half an hour earlier. The 21st Brigade reached the top of the Saint Genois ridge by 11 a.m., after slight opposition, and after halting on the railway beyond, pushed on to the Helchin –Bossuyt road, its objective ; it was, however, unable to take possession of Bossuyt, which, with its outlying château and park presented a problem difficult to solve without artillery. Otherwise the X Corps was aligned parallel and close to the Schelde.

In the XIX Corps the 41st Division (Major-General S. T. B. Lawford) was to pass through the outposts of the 35th at 7.30 a.m., with the line of the Schelde as its objective, and it sent forward the 124th and 122nd Brigades (Br.-Generals R. L. Adlercron and S. V. P. Weston) in battle formation. To the 124th Brigade at first there was little opposition, and the 20/Durham L.I., on the right had occupied Baveghem-knok, north-west of Bossuyt, by noon. The 10/Queen's was delayed by the enemy holding the well-wired ends of the

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canal tunnel east of Hoogstraatje ;[1] so it crossed to the east side of the canal over the tunnel, the support battalion, the 26/Royal Fusiliers, coming up in the centre to fill its place. Machine-gun fire now prevented any progress and the Queen's withdrawing their forward troops, occupied, with the Fusiliers, the line of the road running south from Hoogstraatje in some anxiety as to their left flank. The 122nd Brigade had advanced with all three battalions in line ; in order to reach its objective the Bossuyt–Avelghem road, just short of the Schelde, it had to cross the canal, and it was soon found that the road bridge at Knokke was down and the village impassable owing to the Germans having fired a dump along the railway passing through it. All four companies of the left battalion, the 18/K.R.R.C., in spite of fire from the high ground near Banhout Wood, succeeded by 8.25 a.m. in crossing by the broken Pont Levis No. 2. Major-General Lawford, by 10 a.m. had arranged for the heavy artillery and a field artillery brigade to bombard the Banhout Wood area ; he now ordered the 122nd Brigade to halt and resume the advance at 12.15 p.m., when the artillery would lift and engage the approach to Moen and villages near until 1 p.m. In the result, the 18/K.R.R.C., which had pressed on well, almost to the Hoogmolen ridge, in view of the bombardment fell back half a mile and did not regain the ground abandoned. The centre battalion, the 15/Hampshire, crossed in single file by the débris of the Knokke bridge and advanced about six hundred yards ; the 12/East Surrey, on the right, did not cross the canal, and was brought to a stop by fire from the southern end of the canal tunnel ; so, except on the right, the total gain of ground by the XIX Corps was small.

The II Corps regulated its action by the movements of its neighbours. The 29th Division was ordered to resume its advance in co-operation with the 41st Division (XIX Corps), and it was not until 3.30 p.m. that the 86th Brigade, by divisional order, issued in the belief that the 41st Division had secured Hoogmolen ridge, moved forward under an

[1] Where the tunnel now is the canal originally ran in a cutting through a spur, slight at the southern end and deeper northwards. To allow the railway to pass over the canal a brick tunnel had been built over the latter whose southern end commands a wide field of fire. The tunnel is not mentioned in any German infantry regimental history, so may have been held by part of a machine-gun battalion.

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artillery barrage, pivoting on St. Louis, to capture the high ground near Banhout Wood. By 5 p.m. it had gained this objective. The 9th Division did not move during the 21st October, as the 36th Division on its left was held back by the slow French advance.

In the 36th Division sector, two companies of the 12/R. Irish Rifles (108th Brigade) attacked Dries at 7 a.m. and cleared it in half an hour. This successful affair straightened out the front just in time for the general advance at 7.30 a.m. which was carried out by the 1/R. Irish Rifles (107th Brigade) and 1/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers (108th Brigade) They were without a barrage, as the divisional guns had not yet been brought across the Lys. There were no hedges or buildings to give cover from view, and according to the custom of the country, the lower branches of the trees had been lopped, so the attackers were throughout exposed to long-range machine-gun fire. Moreover, the French regiment on the left, which also had to fight its way forward, was never abreast.[1] The result of the day was that the 36th Division line became a defensive flank, the right being up to the general line of the corps and its left not far from Dries.

Little change took place in the situation of the Second Army on the 22nd and three following days, but the bridges over the Lys were multiplied. The right wing, the XV and X Corps, remained facing the Schelde, supported by their usual artillery (3 brigades R.F.A. and 2 R.G.A.). The divisional boundaries were slightly changed by side-slipping, the front of the X Corps along the Schelde being extended northwards to Autryve. Very few patrols succeeded in crossing the river, and the two or three posts which were established had to be evacuated under pressure. On the 22nd a pontoon bridge which the 200th Field Company R.E. managed to swing at Helchin was badly damaged by gun-fire.

The resistance to the XIX and II Corps stiffened; it was obviously vital for the enemy to hold on to the Courtrai Switch until the divisions opposing the French on the Lys should fall back. Thus the actual strength of the Second Army at the front being small—four battalions as a rule

[1] F.O.A. vii (ii), pp. 225–6, states that no progress was made on the 21st, the Germans attacking the small bridgeheads gained on the Lys. "Only the British made any advance".

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in each division, with companies down to as few as fifty combatants—and the amount of artillery across the Lys able to support them being vastly inferior in numbers to the enemy's, the progress made was slight. The Germans even made a few counter-attacks and in some cases recovered lost ground.

The 124th Brigade of the 41st Division (X Corps) waiting for the troops on its left to come forward, did not move on the 22nd; the left battalion, however, was able to give the 122nd Brigade some slight assistance, as will be seen. This latter brigade was to be formed up by 7.30 a.m., and to attack at 9.30 a.m., with the bridges over the Schelde at and near Escanaffles, 4 miles away, as its objective; it was to have the support of a barrage[1] and beyond its range howitzers would shell selected points. Everything went awry with the attack. The 15/Hampshire, the left battalion of the two which were to advance, was counter-attacked during the previous night, and, although the enemy was beaten off, by morning all ranks were tired out. About 7 a.m. the battalion was counter-attacked again, and the Germans recovered the high ground on the right flank east of the canal near the tunnel, and it was then discovered that the farms and cottages on the left flank were also held by the enemy. The other front line unit, the 12/East Surrey, was caught by machine-gun fire whilst assembling. Br.-General Weston therefore suggested a postponement of the attack, but was told at 7.55 a.m. that it must be launched at all costs. A quarter of an hour before Zero came the bad news that a company of the 18/K.R.R.C., on the left, had met with heavy resistance and was almost surrounded, and six minutes later arrived the further bad news that the 12/East Surrey could not get to the forming-up line in time, as its advance along the east bank of the canal, to which the three companies had crossed, was enfiladed by machine guns. In the absence of the Surrey, the Hampshire extended to cover the front of both battalions.

The barrage opened at 9 a.m. and the Hampshire advanced, but in the next three hours made progress very slowly, although soon after 10 a.m. a company of the 10/Queen's

[1] The 41st Division's artillery consisted of the 187th, 190th and XI (Army) Brigades, R.F.A., and the corps artillery of IV, X, XXV, LXV and XCIX Brigades R.G.A.

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(124th Brigade) crossed the canal and joined the attack, being later followed by the whole battalion. This company, like the East Surrey, was stopped by fire, particularly by that of the machine guns at the southern tunnel entrance. Shortly before midday the officer commanding the Queen's sent in a clear picture of the situation. Further progress was obviously impossible except by a fresh operation, and at 1.10 p.m. brigade orders were sent to the battalions to stand fast. At 1.55 p.m., however, orders were given by the division for a new attack by the 122nd Brigade at 4.30 p.m., the barrage, to be fired by the 190th Brigade R.F.A., beginning five minutes earlier. The attack was duly launched, but made practically no ground. The tunnel remained in German possession until the morning of the 25th.

The II Corps gave as first objective the crest of the ridge marked by the line through Ooteghem and Ingoyghem, and as second a line about half-way between the first and the Schelde. The 29th Division detailed the 87th Brigade, which deployed two battalions on a fourteen hundred yards' frontage, with only three brigades of artillery to support them.[1] Zero here also was 9 a.m.; but from an early hour the enemy shelled the forward area with gas of all kinds mixed with H.E. Then as, for once, there was no morning mist to give concealment, the battalions were observed in their assembly position behind the front line of the 86th Brigade, on the lower slopes of the ridge, and were immediately taken under fire; they were, in consequence, late for the barrage and never caught it up, but managed by short rushes to gain a little ground. The left, the 1/K.O.S.B., did better than the right, and by working up ditches captured 49 prisoners and 6 machine guns in one farm; it also inflicted heavy losses on some Germans seen retiring.

The 9th Division assembled the 27th Brigade (Br.-General W. D. Croft) under cover of a smoke screen; this was blown back by a change of wind, but the enemy's gas shelling combining with it produced a dense fog, and thanks to this, under a barrage fired by three brigades,[2] the 11/Royal Scots surprised the defenders of Vichte and captured the

[1] XV, R.H.A., XVII and 113th Brigades R.F.A. Only the field artillery had so far crossed the Lys; but at dawn heavy artillery began to cross, and by dusk 10 batteries of 6-inch howitzers and 60-pdrs. were over.

[2] L, LI (divisional) and XXVIII (Army) Brigades R.F.A.

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village. Very violent shelling and machine-gun fire then checked the battalion, though it took 20 prisoners. About 11.30 a.m., therefore, the 6/K.O.S.B. was sent up to support it. Hill 50, nearly two miles from the start, was then taken; but machine-gun fire direct from the Ingoyghem ridge in front and enfilade from the south brought the advance to an end. The reserve battalion was then sent up and touch was obtained on both flanks.

The 36th Division (Major-General C. Coffin) used only the 107th Brigade (Br.-General H. J. Brock) in the attack, under a barrage fired by the 153rd Brigade R.F.A. the 108th Brigade being detailed to watch the left flank and keep contact with the French, who were still hanging back. The objective was from a point on the railway, about a thousand yards ahead, N.N.W. to the Gaverbeek.

Only the 2/R. Irish Rifles was sent forward in attack, the 15th being allotted the task of forming a defensive flank back to the Gaverbeek, whence the 108th Brigade continued it. The two leading companies reached the objective, which was on a rise of ground, and were immediately counter-attacked by a Prussian assault battalion and driven back half a mile; but a new attack by a reserve company with another attached from the 15/R. Irish Rifles, and the help of the artillery brigade, restored the situation before any companies of the reserve battalion could arrive. The refused left of the 108th Brigade made contact with the French near Spitaal.[1]

In view of the opposition encountered by the II Corps, and of the French on its left being still halted on the Lys, Lieut.-General Jacob, with General Plumer's approval, at 8.10 p.m. ordered his divisions to consolidate the line they then held and reorganize, adding that the 41st Division (XIX Corps) would relieve the 29th Division (II Corps).

On the 23rd nothing occurred, except on the left, which affected the situation of the Second Army: the 123rd Brigade (Br.-General M. Kemp-Welch) of the 41st Division made a 2.30 a.m. attack against Hoogmolen ridge, which

[1] One account says about 2,000 yards north-west of that place. F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 226 says that the VII Corps, next to the British "could only push a small detachment on to the east bank of the Lys in the region of Vive St. Bavon [about 4,000 yards north of Spitaal]." Carte 7 (reproduced on a reduced scale in Sketch 23) shows no such advance.

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failed; a post of the XV Corps established on the east bank of the Schelde was forced to withdraw; in the X Corps area two pontoon bridges were swung across the river; the 9th Division sent out patrols which found all the localities in front strongly held; in the evening a redistribution of the front line which had been ordered was carried out: the 102nd Brigade of the 34th Division relieved the 101st Brigade; the 123rd and 124th Brigades of the 41st Division relieved the 29th Division, which went into reserve.

There was activity in the 36th Division sector on the left. Late on the 22nd the 2/R. Irish Rifles had captured a German runner, who had lost his way, carrying an order for his unit, the *104th Regiment* (*40th Division*), to assemble at once and march back via Heinweg to Steenbrugge.[1] News also came from the French on the left that the enemy was retiring. At 10.17 a.m. (23rd) the 107th Brigade, to which a squadron of French 28th Dragoons was attached, was ordered to send an advanced guard towards the Schelde, the 108th Brigade being charged, as before, with guarding the left flank. At first no opposition was encountered; but machine-gun fire then became heavy, and although a company of the 1/R. Irish Fusiliers, the advanced guard, cleared Heinweg, over 3 miles from the start, a German counter-attack turned it out. As a general result, the 36th Division had swung its left forward about two and a half miles and was in touch with the French cavalry at a level crossing due south of Waereghem, where an international post was established.

In an order issued by General Plumer at 6.30 p.m. it was stated that the enemy's resistance on the front of the XIX and II Corps had increased, and that at 9 a.m. on the 25th a combined attack was to be made by these corps and the left division of the X Corps, supported by all available artillery.

On the 24th no infantry action took place, except that at 12.15 p.m. the 123rd Brigade of the 41st Division again attacked Hoogmolen, but was again driven back by machine-gun fire.

In the area of the XV and X Corps there was considerable artillery and trench-mortar action, and on the rest of the

[1] " Regt. No. 40 ", p. 397, says it received orders to withdraw at 10.30 p.m. 22nd) to a position behind the Waereghem–Audenarde railway.

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Army front harassing fire by both sides. By midday all the 6-inch howitzer batteries and 60-pdrs. of the II Corps were across the Lys. Patrols which had crossed the Schelde during the hours of darkness by the pontoon bridges and a raft bridge had to return, and two of the bridges were smashed by fire. The XIX and II Corps made preparations for the attack ordered for next day.

A conference between Maréchal Foch and Sir Douglas Haig took place at General Debeney's headquarters (French First Army) at Noyon on the morning of the 24th. The Commander-in-Chief raised the question of the return of the Second Army to his command. He pointed out that he had agreed on the 9th September[1] that this Army should co-operate under the orders of King Albert for the specific purpose of covering, along the Lys, the right of the Belgian Army, and of enabling that Army, supported by French forces, to advance on Bruges and Ghent: this phase of the operation was now over and all five British Armies were aligned on or approaching the Schelde (below Valenciennes)[2] and its north-south tributary the Selle, and confronted with the same problem, the passage of a river: in his opinion the easiest place to force the line of the Schelde was at some point above Audenarde: below this point the minimum number of troops should be employed as a threat; for the attempt to force a passage in that sector in the face of opposition would be very costly.

Maréchal Foch, however, refused to release the Second Army on the grounds of the political value of the King of the Belgians being in command of a group of Allied Armies when he re-entered Brussels. Sir Douglas Haig then stated that if the reason for the Second Army being withheld from his command were political, his instructions should come from the British Government, to which he was responsible for the handling of the British Expeditionary Force, and until so instructed he must continue to view the situation from a military standpoint and insist on the release of the Second Army to his command without delay. Maréchal Foch then asked Sir Douglas Haig to submit his request in writing, which was done next day.

[1] See pp. 4, 269.
[2] See Frontispiece.

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After a further exchange of letters, Maréchal Foch refusing to give way, Sir Douglas Haig, being in Paris, referred the matter to the British Ambassador, Lord Derby, who mentioned the matter to M. Clemenceau and, after an amicable discussion, it was agreed as a compromise that the Second Army should be returned on reaching the line of the Schelde.

The objective of the operations ordered by General Plumer to take place on the 25th by the 34th Division (X Corps), XIX and II Corps, with the French 164th Division and a French cavalry brigade attached to the II Corps co-operating,[1] to which the title of The Action of Ooteghem has been given, was the line of the Schelde. The sector of the 34th Division of this objective was Bossuyt–Autryve both inclusive, and this was gained; on the left, where the opposition was very determined, an advance from about two miles in the south to a mile in the north was made, the extreme left, next the French, at the close of the day being still about four miles from the river.

Before the main attack at 9 a.m. the 1/7th Cheshire of the 102nd Brigade (34th Division) made a subsidiary attack at 3 a.m. north-eastwards to secure the crossings of the Courtrai–Bossuyt canal south of Moen at Locks 3, 4 and 5. A short barrage was fired by three brigades of field artillery (XCVI, 152nd and 160th) and the 34th Machine Gun Battalion, which were later employed to hamper the retreat of the enemy east of the canal. The three companies sent forward failed to cross the canal owing to machine-gun fire, but two of them reached the Helchin–Bossuyt road and cleared Bossuyt; the third, at Lock 4, was counter-attacked, and had forty casualties, and it was not until 3 p.m., when the main attack came abreast of it, that it was able to cross.

The main attack of the 34th Division was made by the 1/4th Cheshire, followed by the 1/1st Herefordshire (both of the 102nd Brigade), at 9.5 a.m., with the right on the canal, under a barrage fired by the three brigades previously in action, smoke being put down on the three locks to cover bridging operations, and the heavy batteries shelling the road

[1] See Sketch 32.

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through Escanaffles from 10.25 a.m. and selected targets, as well as enemy batteries. Opposition was slight and by 9.30 a.m. the tunnel was cleared; by 1 p.m. Moen was captured. The 1/4th Cheshire then went on, its open flank protected by the Herefordshire, and as darkness fell it reached its objective close to the Schelde.

The 41st Division as it had taken over the 29th Division front had deployed the 123rd and 124th Brigades, each with two battalions in front line, and they advanced on a frontage of over five thousand yards under a barrage fired by four brigades (XI, 119th, 187th and 190th), with a line through Herstert, roughly parallel to the front, as intermediate objective.

The 123rd Brigade, with one company of the 34th Division on its right, crossed Hoogmolen ridge before 9.30 a.m., but when descending the forward slope came under very heavy fire, and although Noske was cleared, three hours passed before the hostile machine guns had been disposed of, and the general advance resumed. Although a 2-hour halt had been allowed at the intermediate objective in order to give time for the field artillery to come forward, it was now too late to obtain advantage from the barrage which started from that line. At first resistance was feeble, then it stiffened, but the intermediate objective was reached and passed and the gap between the 41st Division and the 34th Division filled

The other brigade of the 41st Division, the 124th, had trouble from the first; the enemy evidently expected attack and, having withdrawn his front line three hundred yards, quickly dropped his counter-barrage on the advancing troops, and they then met with machine-gun fire from the many farms and cottages. The right, however, got to the Herstert–Ooteghem road, and there dug in. The left did not reach the crest of the ridge west of Ooteghem until 10.30 a.m. and in consequence of casualties did not resume the advance for two hours. The extreme left, despite accurate machine-gun fire, almost entered Ooteghem; but elsewhere little progress was made. During the night, however, a slight further advance was made to join up with the 123rd Brigade.

In the II Corps the first objective was a little over the crest of the main ridge, that is a line about a quarter of a

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mile beyond the villages of Ooteghem and Ingoyghem, where there would be a two hours' halt. The 9th Division had the 26th and 28th Brigades in the line and the barrage was fired by four field brigades (XVII, XXVIII, L and LI) and half the corps 6-inch howitzers, the 60-pdrs. being used for counter-battery work. The division met stout well-organized resistance and a powerful barrage, and made slow progress. At 11 a.m. a report came from the 26th Brigade that it had reached the first objective, but apparently the 28th had not. Actually by a later report at 2.15 p.m. both brigades were still on the western side of the ridge, neither belligerent holding the crest itself. Owing to doubt as to the position of the front line, the second barrage started too far ahead of the first objective, but by 4.50 p.m. some slight progress had been made and Ingoyghem cleared, but not Ooteghem.

The 9 a.m. attack of the 36th Division was made by three battalions of the 109th and 108th Brigades (Br.-Generals W. F. Hessey and E. Vaughan), the barrage being fired by the same artillery as on the 22nd October. They ran at once into machine-gun fire and between noon and 1 p.m. were still short of the crest of the Ooteghem–Ingoyghem–Anseghem ridge. As no hope existed of the French 164th Division coming abreast—it had a post at Heinweg, but its advance reached that place only at the end of the day—the 108th Brigade, which was receiving heavy fire, was swung back till its left was at Heinweg. In view of the progress of the 9th Division on the right at 3.50 p.m. Major-General Coffin ordered the 109th Brigade to attack again at 5 p.m. under a barrage, to secure the crest of the ridge. The orders reached the front line only shortly before zero hour; the attack was, however, made and a little ground gained: but all except the two right companies next to the 9th Division were forced to fall back to the 5 p.m. starting line. The French 3rd Cavalry Brigade had been ordered to Vichte in the vain hope that some opportunity for its engagement might occur, and at night it was withdrawn.

The 26th October was very fine and bright, and the holding of the Second Army on the western bank of the Schelde was extended another three miles down to Rugge. The 40th Division (which had relieved the 31st during the

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previous night), the 14th Division of the XV Corps and the 30th Division of the X Corps, on the western bank of the river down as far as Autryve, passed a quiet day; the 40th managed in the early morning to establish a post in a house at Lock No. 3 and constructed a bridge to take infantry in file nearby.

The other two corps, the XIX and II were able to make an advance as the enemy began falling back to or over the Schelde. The 41st Division (XIX Corps) had the 123rd and 124th Brigades in the line, and at 1 a.m. on the 26th Major-General Lawford, in accordance with corps instructions, issued orders for the 122nd Brigade to pass through the 123rd and, attacking at 2 p.m., to try and reach the Schelde south of Avelghem. An hour later, that is at 2 a.m., a report was received from the 9th Division, on the left, that the enemy was withdrawing to the Schelde. The 122nd Brigade itself heard from Belgian civilians that Avelghem had been evacuated, and that the Germans had fallen back northwards on Rugge. About 9 a.m., too, after continuous night-patrolling towards Ooteghem, the 124th Brigade discovered that the Germans had evacuated long stretches of their line, and their troops were crossing to the eastern bank of the Schelde. By 10 a.m. the 20/Durham L.I. had reached Avelghem, enemy parties falling back in front of the battalion. The 122nd Brigade sent forward patrols and postponed the artillery programme, and later cancelled the attack, substituting, at 12.15 p.m., an order for an advance of all three battalions to the Schelde between Avelghem and Rugge; the 124th, by divisional orders, was to protect the left by establishing the line Rugge-Kloosterhoek, where touch with the 9th Division would be obtained, and this the brigade successfully did.

The 122nd Brigade met with considerable opposition when it advanced shortly after midday, and it was 5.40 p.m. before the line of the Schelde was reached; enemy fire, however, prevented the bridge at Avelghem and other points close to the river being held. The 123rd Brigade, which had moved forward on the right when the 122nd advanced, succeeded in securing the bridges at Autryve intact, but found those between that place and Avelghem had been destroyed.

After the 9th Division (II Corps) had in the early morning discovered that the enemy was withdrawing, the 26th

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Brigade occupied Ooteghem, and the 28th Brigade also advanced. In spite of opposition from isolated groups of Germans still in position, both brigades pressed on. At 12.37 p.m. Major-General Tudor telephoned to them to go on to the Schelde and cover the crossings with fire. Patrols managed to reach the river; but, owing to fire from the north, they could not maintain themselves there.

The 36th Division, on the left, did not advance, as the French did not move; its patrols found the enemy still in position.

During the afternoon of the 26th, in order to provide rest for the divisions which had borne most of the fighting, General Plumer ordered some further shifts of the corps fronts: the XV Corps was to take over (on the 27th/28th) a brigade frontage from the X Corps on its left, which was to hold a brigade in readiness to take a similar frontage from the XIX (the move was made on the 27th/28th); the 41st Division (from XV Corps), which had relieved the 29th (II Corps) was to take over the right sector of the 9th Division (II Corps) on the 27th. The Second Army operation orders directed the XIX Corps to exploit its success by working eastwards to threaten the line of retreat of the enemy holding the high ground (near Tieghem) in front of the II Corps. They also announced that an attack (ordered by King Albert) would be made eastwards by the XIX and II Corps, in co-operation with the French, on the 30th. Five hours later, at the request of the French, this date was changed to the 31st.

The next day, the 27th, passed quietly in the XV and X Corps, and the extensions to the left were carried out. In the northern half of the Army the advance was disappointingly small. The 35th Division again holding the front of the XIX Corps made some progress at first; but Major-General Marindin reported about 10 a.m. that Waermaede and the line of a stream in front of it were strongly held and required a prepared attack.

In the II Corps the enemy in front of the 92nd Brigade of the 31st Division, which had relieved the 9th Division, did not appear disposed to give ground. With good observation from higher ground, his artillery, still superior in number,

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was very active and deluged the area with shell and gas; and no more could be done against his machine-gun fire than push a line of posts forward about seven hundred yards, in the hope of keeping it down.

The 109th Brigade (36th Division) following its patrols reached the Kleinberg, and later, hearing from an inhabitant that the enemy was evacuating his positions, sent its patrols on to keep touch. In the 108th Brigade there was very little change, the French on its left again making no move.

Some air fighting took place, 14 enemy aircraft and 6 balloons being brought down for a loss of 6 machines.

Thus, the broken nature of the country, dotted with small villages, isolated farms, orchards and copses being all in favour of a delaying force, in eight days' fighting the maximum advance by the British had been no more than seven miles, and nowhere had the French or Belgians reached the Schelde. What success had been achieved fell to the flank guard not to the main attack.

NOTE

THE FRENCH IN FLANDERS DURING 20TH–27TH OCTOBER

(Sketch 23)

On the 20th the French Sixth Army, following in pursuit, reached the Lys on its whole front and established two small bridgeheads near Oyghem and Grammene. On the 21st the Germans attacked the bridgeheads without success, but the French were unable to do more than slightly enlarge them. On the 22nd another bridgehead south of Wacken was gained. The progress made on the 23rd, 24th and 25th was small, and on the 26th, in view of " the prolonged resistance in front of the " Flanders Group of Armies and the probable reinforcement of " the enemy ", King Albert decided on a combined attack of all his forces, the preparation for which should be completed by the 29th. No advance of the French Sixth Army or the Belgians took place on the 26th or 27th.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

BETWEEN THE LYS AND THE SCHELDE (*concluded*)

THE SECOND ARMY

28TH OCTOBER—7TH NOVEMBER

ACTION OF TIEGHEM, 31ST OCTOBER

(Sketches, 23, 33, 34)

The 28th, 29th and 30th October [1] were passed in preparations for the projected combined attack of the XIX and II Corps, in co-operation with the French VII Corps (General Massenet), on the 31st.[2] Practically no change in the situation of the Second Army occurred and, except for patrol work and harassing fire and for considerable shelling of the II Corps area, the days were quiet.[3] Attempts made in the XV Corps on the 28th to establish a bridgehead failed; but during the night of the 29th/30th two platoons of the 16/Manchester (14th Division) in three assault parties carried out a successful little operation. Crossing the Schelde at 10 p.m. by bridges thrown south of Helchin and near the mouth of Espierres canal, two parties established bridgeheads and then worked inwards to Lock No. 3, establishing posts, and a third party, following the second, occupied the houses and the lock. On the same night patrols of the 231st Field Company R.E. and the 23/Cheshire (40th Division) crossed the river by a tin float-bridge at the south-west corner of Warcoing, surprised a post on the Herinnes causeway, and returned with 4 prisoners.

The first objective given to the XIX and II Corps for the 31st October was Waermaerde (inclusive)—chapel five hundred yards south of Tieghem–Anseghem (inclusive) roughly a north-south line just beyond the German position. The second objective was Kerkhove (inclusive)—Haelendries–Caster–Anseghem, which formed a curve at the foot

[1] Sketch 33.

[2] The French VII Corps contained from right to left the French 41st, the American 91st and the French 128th Division.

[3] The enemy divisions on the Second Army front were the *12th Bavarian*, *38th*, *56th*, *11th Reserve*, *23rd Reserve*, with the *6th Bavarian Reserve* and *39th* in reserve.

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of the higher ground. For the attack of the XIX Corps, the 35th Division (Major-General A. H. Marindin) was detailed; for that of the II Corps, the 31st Division (Major-General J. Campbell), and the 34th Division (Major-General C. L. Nicholson), which had joined the II Corps from the X Corps on the 28th. Each division had the support of three or four brigades of field artillery.[1] A vital factor for the success of the attack was the fullest neutralization of the hostile batteries and machine guns on the east bank of the Schelde, and the masking by smoke of the high ground in enemy hands which, beginning opposite Avelghem, runs northwards for some miles. For these purposes, all the corps artillery, including 8-inch and 9·2-inch howitzers of the XIX and II Corps, with the field batteries of the resting divisions, under the two G.O.Cs. R.A. (Br.-Generals W. B. R. Sandys and A. D. Kirby) were employed, and on the right three heavy brigades of the X Corps and the field brigades of the 30th Division gave their assistance. Some 6-inch howitzers were brought forward to within about fifteen hundred yards of the enemy's machine guns. Two companies of tanks were lent by the French for the use of the II Corps.

Zero hour was made 5.25 a.m., and the artillery barrage, as usual supplemented by machine guns, moved at the rate of a hundred yards in three minutes, with the first lift three minutes after zero hour, and a two hours' pause on the first objective to allow batteries to be brought forward. An international liaison detachment to move along the boundary was formed by half a company of the 1/8th Scottish Rifles (34th Division) and one company of the French 164th Regiment, under a British officer. By Second Army instructions, if the French were unable to get beyond the first objective, the liaison force would form a defensive flank along the boundary between the II Corps second objective and the French first objective: when the French did reach the second objective, the XIX Corps would extend northwards along the Schelde and the II Corps would be relieved.

Each of the three attacking divisions sent forward one brigade.

[1] 35th Division, its own, 119th (Army) and 4 6-inch howitzers. 31st Division, its own, L (9th Division) and XXVIII (Army); and LXXVII R.G.A. 34th Division, its own, LI (9th Division), 113th (Army); and LXXXVI R.G.A.

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The 104th Brigade of the 35th Division made the attack with all three battalions in line, using two companies for the first and two for the second objective.

In the II Corps, the 94th Brigade (Br.-General A. Symons) of the 31st Division and the 103rd Brigade (Br.-General R. I. Rawson) of the 34th Division, each put two battalions in front line, those of the latter brigade accompanied by ten French tanks.

Retaliation to the barrage was not severe, though the valley west of Ingoyghem was heavily gassed; but in the farms and villages of the densely populated countryside considerable fight was shown by the enemy machine-gunners, the resistance being stronger in the north than in the south; but in the former quarter the tanks, working on ground suitable for them, gave invaluable help. Greatly owing to the excellent artillery barrage, the attackers carried all before them. Thus the first objective, including all but the northern part of Anseghem, was reached by 6.45 a.m. according to schedule, and, after two hours' pause, the second, including Anseghem, between 10 and 11 a.m. The French 41st Division had been held up north of Anseghem.[1]

For some time touch was lost not only of the French, but also of the international liaison detachment, and the half-company of the 1/8th Scottish Rifles and the section of tanks with it on the extreme British left had to face north-east against heavy trench-mortar and machine-gun fire from a village north-west of Anseghem.

About noon, 35th Division headquarters received an order from the XIX Corps to exploit beyond the second objective, and if possible seize Eeuwhoek (2,000 yards E.S.E. of Caster on the Schelde), adding the information that the II Corps would also push on, but the presence for counter-attack west of the Schelde of two German divisions was possible.[2] They did not appear, and Eeuwhoek was taken by the 104th Brigade during the evening, thus completing the line of the Second Army on the western bank of the Schelde up to the international boundary.

The II Corps also made progress eastward. At 12.35 p.m. headquarters had informed the 31st and 34th

[1] See Note at end of Chapter.

[2] News had been received of the arrival of the *13th Reserve* and *21st Divisions* from the general reserve.

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Divisions that the 35th Division was going to exploit and that the French 41st Division was organizing an attack on the high ground half a mile north-east of Anseghem in the afternoon: the two divisions were, therefore, to give assistance by advancing northeastward to Enseghem–Gyselbrechteghem–Boschkant (actually all in the French area). The attack by the French 41st Division did not take place, as it was dark before its preparations were complete; so Br.-General Rawson (103rd Brigade) ordered his battalions to hold the line which they occupied and push out patrols to secure any ground evacuated by the enemy and be prepared to continue the attack next morning. A company of the 101st Brigade (Br.-General W. J. Woodcock) was sent to get in touch with the international liaison force and fill the gap between the British left and the French right; which was done. The 31st Division, like the 35th, waited until dark before attempting to advance again, and meantime about 8 p.m. all divisions received orders from the corps that the attack would be continued next day at 6.30 a.m.[1]

Br.-General Rawson's anticipation proved correct; his patrols found that the enemy had evacuated the high ground near Boschkant, and he therefore ordered the 1/5th K.O.S.B. and 1/8th Scottish Rifles to exploit the situation. At 1.30 a.m. (1st November) the latter battalion reported that Boschkant was clear and its patrols were moving up Hills 74 and 83, the one to the north and the other to the south of the village, and that the K.O.S.B. were in Gyselbrechteghem to the east. At 2.30 a.m. a further report said that the two hills had been occupied and the patrols were still moving on. The artillery barrages ordered were therefore cancelled, and a little later the attack also which they had been intended to cover. The 103rd Brigade continued on, and after the attack had been cancelled the 94th Brigade (31st Division), on its right near the Schelde, was ordered forward north-eastward between the river and railroad into the French area. The Germans, having retired across the Schelde, the patrols encountered no opposition. About 9 a.m. (1st November) French troops appeared on Hill 83, and towards 3 p.m. at Driesch, which the 94th Brigade had

[1] "During the evening" the King of the Belgians ordered General de Boissoudy to continue to press in the direction of the Schelde: the left of the British Second Army, combining its attacks with those of the French Sixth Army, would assure the progress of that Army. (F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 311).

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reached. The troops of the 31st and 34th Divisions were then withdrawn and the whole II Corps went into reserve, its 9th Division being already in a rear area. At 6 p.m. the corps boundaries on the Schelde were readjusted: the left of the XV being shifted down to Bossuyt, of the X to Rugge, and of the XIX to Eeuwhoek.

The whole French Sixth Army[1] had during the 31st October moved forward about five miles, and its leading troops reached the western bend of the Schelde from the international boundary northward, covering about 13 miles, past Audenarde,[2] to Eecke (6½ miles S.S.W. of Ghent): the Belgians were still held up on the Deynze–Eecloo canal west of Ghent.

The problem now was to cross the Schelde.[3] Its canalized course was widened as an obstacle by numerous loops of the original river bed, by natural inundations and by drainage channels, there being one long wide one south of Bossuyt east of the river, called le Grand Courant, and another north of Avelghem west of the river called the Rijtgracht. General Plumer on the 31st October laid down as an artillery policy that sufficient guns must be kept in action to hold the line of the river and carry out counter-battery work: the remainder would be retained outside the shelled area until required for forcing the passage: vigorous counter-battery work would be carried out, destructive shoots being of even greater importance than before on account of the difficulties being experienced by the enemy in replacing personnel and equipment: every preparation should be made to place the whole of the artillery, with the exception of super-heavy guns and howitzers in action, for the purpose of supporting the crossing and the advance on the eastern bank up to the limit of range: positions for field artillery should be selected as close to the west bank as possible, those for heavy artillery within two thousand yards of the west bank: otherwise the western bank was to be held lightly.

Bad weather with low clouds and rain made observation of movement impossible; prisoners had no knowledge of an immediate withdrawal, but all the permanent bridges

[1] See Sketch 34.
[2] The site of Marlborough's battle. Audenarde is the French, Oudenarde the Flemish form.
[3] See Sketch 33.

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on the British and French [illegible] the railways were being damaged.

At 1 p.m. on the 4th November the line [illegible] Army had reverted to the command of [illegible] General Plumer visited [illegible] orders to reconnoitre [illegible] advanced guards if they [illegible] and cross the Schelde on or [illegible] which date the command [illegible] be ready. Preliminary orders [illegible] defence weaken had already been issued [illegible] bringing up of bridging material was [illegible] were daily taken to test for signs of withdrawal [illegible] responding with gas bombardments and harassing fire. Everywhere patrols encountered opposition, and from the 1st to the 7th there was no change in the general situation on the Schelde. On the night of the 4th/5th a very successful minor operation was carried out by the 53 London and the 61st Field Company R.E. of the 14th Division XV Corps. Three bridges were thrown, two east of Heldin and the third at the south-east corner of Bosrijt, by each of which a platoon crossed. Although the centre bridge could not at first be used, ten posts were established to form a bridgehead, fifteen Germans killed and twenty-three captured. On the same night the 124th Brigade (41st Division) sent two strong parties across a bridge south of Kerkhove; after finding that a bridge north-west of Berchem was held in force they withdrew.

On the 5th the enemy airmen were active and, "although "the end of the war was so near, fought with fine determina- "tion".[1] On this day General Plumer issued orders for the passage of the Schelde as outlined by Sir Douglas Haig; as the enemy withdrew from the river before the 11th November, and the set attack did not take place, it is sufficient to say that the orders contemplated an operation in two phases; first, the passage of the river by night with the support of all artillery available and the deployment of the troops on the eastern bank, and, secondly, about two and a half hours later,

[1] "War in the Air" vi, p. 556.

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an advance under a creeping barrage. Conferences were held in the corps and divisions to decide upon the places of forming up and the gun positions, and discuss the time required for the passage and the training to be undertaken, and to settle other details.

Bad weather, rain and low clouds prevented any air activity on the 6th and 7th. On the former day, General Degoutte, the French Chief of the Staff of the G.A.F., visited Sir Douglas Haig to express his appreciation of the important results achieved by the Second Army whilst under King Albert. He was anxious to obtain the views of the British Commander-in-Chief as regards the future, and expressed his desire to follow his " directive ". Sir Douglas Haig told him that he thought the Germans would be unlikely to remain on the Schelde in force, owing to the British success in the direction of Maubeuge, but that if they did he proposed to force the passage of the river with his Fifth and Second Armies on the 11th November, and then push the Cavalry Corps on as soon as possible. General Degoutte said that he was in full agreement and promised that the G.A.F. should co-operate.

At a conference held next day at Fifth Army headquarters in Lille, at which Generals Plumer and Birdwood and Lieut.-General Kavanagh (Cavalry Corps) were present, the Commander-in-Chief pointed out [1] that south of the Mons–Condé canal British troops were in Bavai, and close to Avesnes, and were still pressing on: the enemy position along the Schelde about Tournai had become a great salient, and he doubted whether the Germans could remain in it much longer without incurring a serious risk of being cut off: in any case he had, as they already knew, decided to force the passage of the river with the Fifth and Second Armies on Monday 11th November, unless before then the enemy had fallen back: in this event he must be followed up with mounted troops and strong advanced guards. Both General Birdwood and General Plumer stated that they had plans prepared and would be ready to attack on the 11th, the object being to force the passage of the Schelde and advance

[1] See Frontispiece.

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as soon as possible after crossing and gain possession of the line of the Dendre. A formal operation order to the above effect, including all the Armies, was then issued by G.H.Q.[1]

NOTE

THE FRENCH AND BELGIANS IN FLANDERS DURING 28TH OCTOBER–7TH NOVEMBER

(Sketches 23, 34)

The 28th, 29th and 30th October were spent by the French Sixth Army in preparation and in improving the lie of their jumping-off line for the combined attack of the 31st October. Only a small amount of ground was gained on that day. The following is the French account (F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 310–11): "In general the French Armée de Belgique met with obstinate "resistance. The ground, dotted with isolated farms, thickets "and hedges, was defended by a very large number of machine "guns which the infantry units had continually to turn and "capture by their own efforts. There could be no question of "artillery dealing with these multiple targets, mobile, skilfully "camouflaged and difficult to spot. Thus, on the right of the "Army, the VII Corps from its very start came under the fire of "automatic weapons against which it had to mount and execute "a whole series of local actions. In the XXX Corps the situation "was nearly identical. On the left, the XXXIV Corps struck "defences strongly held. By night, at the cost of immense "efforts, the VII Corps reached the line shown on the map. "[Sketch 34]".

During the night of the 31st October/1st November patrols discovered the German retirement, and on the 1st November, against "feeble resistance", the Sixth Army went forward right up to the Schelde, except on the extreme left, where a flank was turned back, as the Belgian Army was still held up on the Lys–Eecloo canal. The American 37th Division, on the right of the XXX Corps, had managed to push some parties on to the right bank, and during the night attempts were made to throw French parties across the Schelde, but all failed except one by the 41st Division (right of VII Corps). On the 2nd November the VII Corps remained stationary, the American 37th Division enlarged its bridgehead, and advanced guards of the left wing of the XXXIV Corps, finding nothing in front of them, entered the Belgian sector and with the Belgians pressed towards Ghent.

[1] See Chapter XXXII.

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No event of importance marked the 3rd November in the French Sixth Army, but the Belgian Army, preceded by its cavalry, starting during the night of the 2nd/3rd, made some progress towards Ghent until stopped by inundations and fire. " On the " 3rd and 4th November the VII and XXXIV Corps carried out " reliefs of the divisions in front line. On the 5th November " all the movements of infantry were completed ". On this day the great enemy retirement on the front from the Argonne to Condé was reported; but patrols on the Sixth Army's and Belgian front continued to meet with obstinate resistance. The 6th was spent in mounting an attack, and on " the 7th and " 8th November the divisions tried to throw infantry parties across " to the right bank of the Schelde. But the enemy re-acted with " violence, and only a few companies succeeded in crossing between " Audenarde and Eecke ".

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CHAPTER XXIX

Battle of Valenciennes
1st–3rd November
The Third and First Armies
(Sketch 35)

By a G.H.Q. decision the First Army was not permitted to carry out a bombardment of Valenciennes, as it was a French town, full not only of inhabitants but also of refugees. It was permissible, however, to shell houses overlooking the canal when its passage was being attempted by patrols. The town was protected on the west by the Schelde canal, its width increased by floods, and the houses on the well-wired eastern bank bristling with machine guns, so an infantry assault was out of the question. General Horne decided therefore to turn the town by the south, where the XXII Corps was already across the Schelde canal. During the 28th October the first stage of the plan had been partially executed, the 51st Division carrying the line forward to Mont Houy (exclusive) and to le Poirier station (inclusive). On the night of the 29th/30th, in view of the second stage, the 51st Division had been relieved by the 147th and 146th Brigades of the 49th Division, and the 10th Canadian Brigade of the 4th Canadian Division, so that the XXII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Godley) then had the 4th and 49th Divisions in the line, and its boundary with the Canadian Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Currie) ran just south of Valenciennes. In the second stage, now to be carried out, these two corps, the 61st Division of the XVII Corps on the right co-operating, were to capture Préseau and the Préseau–Marly road (Marly exclusive). It was subsequently settled, at the suggestion of Lieut.-General Currie, that the 10th Canadian Brigade (Br.-General J. M. Ross) should capture Marly and the southern outskirts of Valenciennes, and that as the attack advanced to a second objective some two thousand yards beyond the one already defined, the 12th Canadian Brigade (Br.-General J. H. MacBrien) from the west side of the Schelde canal should force its way into Valenciennes. It was hoped that for the general attack fixed for the 4th November the XXII and Canadian Corps would be on a line beyond Jenlain and Estreux—as they actually were. Zero was made 5.15 a.m.

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In front of the XXII and Canadian Corps lay the valley of the Rhonelle, and beyond it a broad furrowed ridge sloping gently downwards from Orsinval and Wargnies le Petit in the south towards Valenciennes, and cut into only by the valley of a small stream which flows from Préseau to the Rhonelle. The latter stream is about 20 feet wide and 4 to 6 feet deep between Artres and Famars. The enemy had a strong outpost line on the western side of the Rhonelle (except near Artres, where the XVII Corps had a small bridgehead); his main line was on the heights, about the line of the Préseau–Marly road; and he had an intermediate line between them. It was estimated, and the information proved to be correct according to prisoners subsequently taken, that there were six German divisions on the front of attack, with two more close at hand.[1] There was some enemy counter-preparation with gas and H.E. during the night of the 31st October/1st November, and when the British attack opened next morning the German artillery quickly responded; but its fire gradually slackened. Throughout the day the enemy machine-gunners fought stoutly, but the infantrymen surrendered freely whenever they got a chance.

The weather was bad during the night preceding the attack, but it then turned fair, with occasional showers and with fair visibility, and bombs were dropped on Jenlain, Onnaing and St. Saulve, and on troops and transport during the day. After midday the enemy's activity in the air increased considerably and a number of indecisive combats took place, two of the German machines, however, crashed.

The part to be played by the 61st Division (Major-General F. J. Duncan) of the XVII Corps (Third Army) was to capture Maresches and St. Hubert; it had the support of 9 brigades of field artillery,[2] and 4 of heavy under the

[1] The *48th Reserve, 111th, 214th, 26th Reserve, 6th* and *220th*, the left wing of the *Seventeenth Army*, with the *28th Reserve* (just arrived from the Woeuvre and the *25th* (resting since 28th October) in second line.

[2] Those of the 19th, 24th and 61st Divisions, 315th (Army), XLI and XLII of the VI Corps; the LXXXVII of the 19th Division was to barrage the northern flank from Zero to dawn, and then put down a smoke screen to deny the enemy observation from Préseau. From Zero to Zero + 45 minutes every available heavy gun was to be turned on to counter-battery work, a proportion was then to be taken off and used to fire on strongpoints, sweep approaches, etc.

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C.R.A. of the XVII Corps (Br.-General E. H. Willis), and arrangements were made for the repair of bridges over the Rhonelle to take artillery of all calibres as soon as possible.

The 182nd Brigade (Br.-General W. K. Evans) was to make the main attack on the 1st November, crossing the Rhonelle at Artres before Zero by seven footbridges thrown by the 476th Field Company R.E. Two of its battalions, the 2/8th Worcestershire and the 2/7th R. Warwickshire, were formed up on the eastern bank by 4.30 a.m. The advance went well at first; Maresches was entered by 7.15 a.m., and many prisoners were taken (761 in all) during the day; the left then came under machine-gun fire from St. Hubert, across a shallow valley, and was checked; but by 8.30 a.m., except for a small area about the cross-roads at St. Hubert, the objective had been gained, and the 9/Northumberland Fusiliers (183rd Brigade), having crossed the Rhonelle by ladder-bridges, had come up on the right flank.

About 9.30 a.m. the enemy made a strong counter-attack,[1] supported by 4 captured British tanks, which struck the left wing of the 61st, the 4th Division (XXII Corps) and the right wing of the 49th Division, forcing them back, although two sections of the 107th Brigade R.F.A., which had crossed the Rhonelle by a bridge near Artres about 8.30 a.m., knocked out two of the tanks. A new line was established by the 61st Division from the Rhonelle past the eastern edge of Maresches to the south of Préseau.

At 1 p.m. Major-General Duncan spoke to the G.O.C. 4th Division, Major-General Lucas, suggesting a renewal of the attack to secure the objective; but the latter had already arranged with the 49th Division to wait until the following morning. By XVII Corps orders, however, given at 1.55 p.m., the 61st Division was to attack whether the 4th Division co-operated or not; so, at 7.30 p.m., after several postponements, the 2/5th Gloucestershire of the 184th Brigade (Br.-General A. F. A. N. Thorne) was sent forward under a barrage. This attempt to advance was soon checked by machine-gun fire from St. Hubert and Préseau, and further operations were then postponed until the 2nd.

At Zero, the 4th Division had sent forward the 11th Brigade (Br.-General W. J. Webb-Bowen) with the artillery

[1] Carried out by the fresh *28th Reserve Division.*

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support of nine brigades R.F.A. and one R.G.A.[1] The 1/Rifle Brigade and 1/Hampshire led, with the village of Préseau and the road thence to Marly for a thousand yards as objective. The line was nearly reached and Préseau was being mopped up, 750 prisoners being taken,[2] when at 9.30 a.m. the counter-attack above mentioned drove the battalions back. Another enemy advance about 4.30 p.m. forced them to give a little more ground : so that at night the line ran 500 yards west of Préseau and thence along the Préseau–Aulnoy road.

The 49th Division (Major-General N. J. G. Cameron) had employed the 147th and 146th Brigades (Br.-Generals H. H. S. Morant and G. A. P. Rennie), which had the 6/Duke of Wellington's and 5/West Yorkshire leading. Under a barrage of seven brigades R.F.A. and one R.G.A.[3] and machine guns, the German outposts were quickly driven in and 300 prisoners taken ; duckboards were thrown over the Rhonelle, 2 trestle bridges for field artillery being subsequently built, and the infantry, pushing swiftly up-hill, captured the intermediate line, the Préseau–Aulnoy road, with 400 more prisoners. Resistance then stiffened, but good progress was made until the 9.30 a.m. counter-attack struck the right and drove it back. By noon, however, the left was on the objective, and the rest of the two brigades were not far from it. Machine-gun fire from the right and from the Steelworks on the left, however, forced a slight withdrawal. About 4.30 p.m. another counter-attack on the whole divisional front under a heavy barrage was repelled, and half an hour later an advance was made to within 400 yards of the objective. Over three hundred German dead were counted, and a total of 15 officers and 790 other ranks, with about another hundred wounded, had been captured by the division.

The 4th Canadian Division (Major-General Sir D. Watson) was astride the Schelde, the 10th Brigade (Br.-General J. M. Ross) with the 11th (Br.-General V. W. Odlum) in support, east of the river, and the 12th west. The

[1] Those of the 4th and 11th Divisions and the XVIII, XXVI, LII, 175th and 282nd (Army) Brigades and the VII Brigade R.G.A., under Br.-General C. A. Sykes.

[2] Of the *48th Reserve*, *111th* and *214th Divisions*.

[3] Those of the 49th and 51st Divisions, and the LXXVII, 147th and 189th (Army) Brigades, and the XXXIV Brigade R.G.A. under Br.-General A. B. Forman.

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attack was supported by the artillery of the 39th, 2nd Canadian and 4th Canadian Divisions, three of their brigades being east of the river; and those of the 5th Canadian Division fired in enfilade from the west bank.

The line of communication, an indifferent road 10 miles back to Somain, being on the western bank, the supply of the troops, presented considerable difficulties, but sufficient ammunition for both field and heavy artillery was carried to the guns.

The 10th Canadian Brigade sent forward the 44th and 47th Battalions along the western side of the Rhonelle. Two objectives were defined, the first about two thousand yards from the jumping-off line, where the 46th Battalion was to leap-frog the 44th, and the second, Marly and the southern outskirts of Valenciennes. The early part of the operation went according to plan: Mount Houy was carried and many prisoners sent back; but the enemy machine guns held on to the Steelworks, Marly and the southern outskirts of Valenciennes, and the supporting artillery, especially that of the 5th Canadian Division, suffered from the enemy's batteries north of Valenciennes and during the morning from low-flying air attacks. Towards noon the falling back of the left of the 49th Division exposed the right of the 10th Canadian Brigade, so the 50th Battalion and six batteries of machine guns were used to support it. It not only stood fast, but with the Canadian artillery also assisted to repel the 4.30 p.m. counter-attack against the 49th Division. It was not until 10 p.m. that patrols entered Marly, the prisoners taken stating that they belonged to the rear guard and that the main body had withdrawn early in the evening. The Steelworks, which the 49th Division should have taken, still held out, and continued to give trouble.

It had been arranged that at night the 11th Canadian Brigade should relieve the 146th Brigade (49th Division) and the 10th Canadian Brigade on the second objective; but as all of this had not been gained, the relief of the 146th Brigade did not take place, and it was left to the 148th Brigade to gain possession of its portion of the objective, including the Steelworks, next day.

Meantime the 12th Canadian Brigade had entered Valenciennes. Three companies of the 38th Battalion had succeeded in crossing the Schelde canal in the early morning

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at the south-western corner of the town, and a platoon of the 72nd Battalion did so at the north-western corner. By noon the two battalions were across; but owing to opposition the brigade was not able to get farther than the railway on the western side of Valenciennes. The prisoners taken by the Canadians during the day totalled 1,400 with seven field guns and over eight hundred enemy dead were counted.

The enemy had, with seven divisions engaged against four, put up a stout resistance, but was obviously weakening or drawing off.

The combined attack was continued at 5.30 a.m. on the 2nd November, a dull day with some rain, by all the divisions engaged, and resulted in the gain of a bridgehead around Valenciennes. At first there was some opposition from machine guns, but the advance was pushed vigorously, and the enemy became demoralized and surrendered in large numbers. The 2/5th Gloucestershire and 2/4th Oxfordshire L.I. (184th Brigade), leading the advance of the 61st Division, pushed a thousand yards over the objective to the ridge beyond St. Hubert, taking 2 tanks and 620 prisoners. The 2/Seaforth (11th Brigade) and the 1/King's Own (12th Brigade) of the 4th Division reached the continuation of the same ridge east of Préseau, and then consolidated by corps order, after taking 34 officers, 650 other ranks and 5 field guns. The 148th Brigade (Br.-General L. F. Green-Wilkinson) of the 49th Division was nearly equally successful; the 4/York & Lancaster was, however, held up by the Steelworks until 3 p.m., when after a hurricane bombardment, they were rushed and taken with 211 prisoners.

In the sector of the 4th Canadian Division, though Marly was occupied, the Germans continued to hold on to Valenciennes, but by 7.20 a.m. it had been cleared by the 12th Canadian Brigade, which joined hands with the 11th Canadian Brigade east of the town, and then pushed forward patrols to St. Saulve and south-eastwards. This latter brigade at first met with resistance from the high ground east of Marly, and until the Steelworks had been taken was hampered on its right by machine-gun fire. Both Valenciennes and St. Saulve were shelled by the enemy's heavy artillery during the afternoon, and reports came from the air that

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German movements westwards had been observed, and that the enemy was concentrating troops opposite to the Canadians. Counter-preparation fire was put down at 4.30 p.m. and 5 p.m. No attack developed; but progress had been delayed by the enemy threat against the small forces which had crossed the Rhonelle and the Schelde, and, although definite success had been achieved on the 2nd November, fear of counter-attack persisted until the following morning.

A number of reliefs were in consequence carried out during the night of the 2nd/3rd, the 61st Division being relieved by the 24th and 19th Divisions, the 4th Division by the 11th Division, whilst the 168th Brigade (56th Division) replaced the 147th and right half of the 148th Brigade (49th Division), and the 8th Division (VIII Corps) took over the northern part of the Canadian Corps front.

During the night there was slight harassing fire on the front areas, but so far from there being immediate danger of counter-attack, patrols soon discovered on the 3rd that the enemy had withdrawn. The day was again dull, with low clouds and poor visibility, so the R.A.F. could give little assistance. The usual pursuit by mounted troops and infantry was organized: some artillery fire was experienced, but so few of the enemy remained within reach that only 59 prisoners were taken during the day by the First Army. By evening the XXII Corps had captured Curgies and Saultain and reached the railway Jenlain–Curgies, and the high ground east of it. The 32nd and 33rd Brigades of the 11th Division, and the 148th, 168th and 169th Brigades, under the 56th Division, met with no opposition, and picked up only seven prisoners; but mounted parties sent ahead found the line of the Aunelle held. The 56th Brigade of the 19th Division (XVII Corps), covering the right flank of the XXII Corps, however, arrived at the western edge of Jenlain only after some sharp fighting, which caused the enemy to withdraw from the village. The 73rd Brigade (24th Division) on its right, starting late as the enemy clung to Villers Pol, came up to the Le Quesnoy–Jenlain road, and two battalions of the Guards Division (VI Corps) occupied Villers Pol. By 1 p.m. patrols of the 4th Canadian Division were pushing on to the high ground Estreux–Onnaing, and mobile troops were brushing rear guards away near Onnaing. The enemy

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now offered resistance to the Canadians from a sunken road and farm buildings, and a general line in rear of the advanced troops was occupied by them about 6 p.m. During the day the 3rd Canadian Division improved its position by establishing posts on the eastern bank of the Schelde, and, building bridges near Bruay, Thiers and Escaupont. Its patrols went as far as Vicq, finding enemy posts still held.

The XVII, XXII and Canadian Corps had reached their jumping-off line; but in consequence of the retirement of the enemy from the Schelde and the abandonment of Valenciennes, the set piece planned by the First Army for the 4th November in conjunction with the Fourth and Third Armies was abandoned, and orders given for the 11th and 56th Divisions (XXII Corps) to pursue, acting independently and with vigour, so as to deny the enemy opportunity for settling into an organized position. The Bavai–Hensies road, 10 miles ahead, was given as the first objective; the XVII Corps was to join hands with the XXII on the Aunelle, and the Canadian Corps to cover the left.

The reports received at the close of the 5th November, indicated a general movement of enemy troops into Belgium from the south, also eastwards from the Mezières–Sedan sector, where they were evidently withdrawing before the advance of the American Armies and the French Fourth Army.

NOTE

The French and American Offensive of 1st November

(Sketch 21)

The offensive of the American First Army and right of the French Fourth Army, began on the 1st November and continued on the following days. It resulted at once in a considerable advance. The American V Corps in the centre drove a wedge five miles deep into the German defence. To quote General Pershing (p. 682), "The success of the attack in the centre on the "1st November compelled the retirement of the enemy on the "2nd along the entire front of the I Corps [on the left] and in "front of the right of the French Fourth Army . . . . The "attack was continued with vigour on the 2nd and 3rd "November."

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CHAPTER XXX

Battle of the Sambre

4th November[1]

The Fourth, Third and First Armies

(Frontispiece ; Sketches 30, 36, 37, 38.)

The formal warning order for the next combined offensive had been issued from G.H.Q. on the 29th October. It ran : " The Fourth, Third and First Armies will be prepared to " resume the offensive on or after the 3rd November [the " 4th was subsequently fixed], with a view to breaking the " enemy's resistance south of the Condé canal and advancing " in the general direction Avesnes–Maubeuge–Mons ", and it was stated that the French First Army would co-operate on the right in the direction of La Capelle. The actual attack of these four Allied Armies extended from Guise to Condé, a frontage, measured straight, of over forty miles. The country ahead was, in the military sense, difficult.[2] The Sambre and Oise canal, which from Landrecies northward becomes the canalized Sambre, was 70 feet wide from bank to bank and 35 to 40 feet at water-level, except near the locks, where it was 17 feet wide ; at the reservoirs near Fesmy, where it was double the general width of the canal, and at a " port " between Ors and Landrecies, where the width was 60 feet. The depth was six feet and the bottom muddy. Nears Ors lock the Germans had inundated the low ground, ankle deep only, but transforming it into a swamp, and the small streams alongside the canal near Catillon and Ors were swollen to a width of 15 feet.

The Germans had cut timber in the great Forest of Mormal,[3] but in the untouched portions dense undergrowth hampered movement ; many streams had their sources in the forest and ran in narrow channels with steep banks. Nearly all the numerous rides and tracks were unmetalled but had a

[1] For the advance as a whole in the period 4th–11th November see Frontispiece.

[2] See Sketch 30.

[3] See Sketch 36.

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gravel surface and the best, including the one highway, Jolimetz–Locquignol, ran nearly east and west.

In the north[1] the land on either side of the Condé–Mons canal, and a wide belt east of the Schelde between Valenciennes and Condé were a network of irrigation channels.

Between these three specified areas the country was cut into ridges by the tributaries of the Sambre and the Schelde, and considerably accidented. The villages were surrounded by orchards and small fields enclosed by thick hedges; a small amount of cultivation was carried on in large fields without marked boundaries, but the area as a whole was pasture land intersected by hedges and wire.

The Fourth Army[2]

As early as the 25th October General Rawlinson had warned his two corps that operations would be continued shortly with a view to forcing a passage of the Sambre and Oise canal and securing a footing in the Forest of Mormal; the first objective fixed on the receipt of G.H.Q. orders four days later, was a north-south line a little over three miles from the front, with a line of exploitation eight miles beyond. The XIII Corps, on the left, was directed to fix zero hour (6.15 a.m. was selected) and was informed that the Third Army would attack simultaneously (the hour was, in fact, fixed by the Third Army); the IX Corps was to attack two or three hours later (but 5.45 a.m. was selected), and was informed that the French First Army was being asked to attack at the same time (and the XV and XXXVI Corps, next to the British, did so at 5.45 a.m.).[3] The time change in the succession of attacks was made at the request of Lieut.-General Braithwaite, as it seemed more important that the IX Corps should enjoy the benefit of surprise for the passage of the canal rather than any advantage that might accrue from an outflanking movement of the XIII Corps, whose right flank, too, would be exposed until the IX Corps came abreast of it.

During the preparations for the offensive between the 1st and 3rd November, the IX Corps continued its clearing up operations on the western bank of the Sambre–Oise

[1] See Sketch 37.
[2] See Sketch 30.
[3] F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 285.

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canal, so that by the eve of the attacks on its north-south reach the enemy was in possession of only Catillon and a water-surrounded stronghold north of that townlet known as le Donjon. Farther north, where the extreme left of the corps was still two thousand yards from the canal, it was desirable to secure a spur near Happegarbes Farm, from which the 32nd Division was enfiladed, and fierce fighting for it took place. At 6 a.m. on the 1st November the 15/ Lancashire Fusiliers (96th Brigade), under a barrage, with three tanks of the 10th Battalion (one tank was ditched) succeeded in capturing it; but, after repelling one counter-attack at 9 a.m., the Lancashire men were turned off it by another at 2 p.m. On the 3rd the same battalion, with two companies of the 16th, again attacked at 6 a.m. and took the ridge. A German counter-attack by five battalions[1] at 1 p.m. was beaten off, although the Fusiliers were at one time almost surrounded. The casualties, however, had been heavy, and at nightfall the six companies were withdrawn to the starting line for the offensive of next day.

In the XIII Corps only active patrolling took place. On the 30th October the 50th Division relieved the left wing of the 25th and sent up the 150th Brigade, so that the corps had the 25th, 50th and 18th Divisions in the line, with the 66th Division in reserve. The IX Corps kept the 1st and 32nd Divisions in the line with the 6th and 46th in reserve.[2]

On the 1st November the weather was unfavourable for air work; on the 2nd and 3rd mist and rain allowed only of attacks from a low height; but on the 4th, it may be added, after the mist cleared considerable air activity blazed up again and low-flying attacks added to the enemy's troubles.[3]

The pause of ten days on the canal between the 25th October and 3rd November had given time for careful

[1] Two cyclist and a regiment of the *1st Guard Reserve Division.*

[2] Opposed to the 5 divisions in front line with 4 in reserve of the Fourth Army on 4th November were, it is believed; 8½ German in front line: the *29th, 19th Reserve, 204th* (*Eighteenth Army*); *22nd Reserve, 54th,* the *cyclist brigade, Jäger, 1st Guard Reserve, 58th* (*Second Army*). The boundary between the German *Eighteenth* and *Second Armies* ran just south of Catillon to Grand Fayt, and close on either side of the boundary were the Army reserves, each of 4 divisions: total 9 divisions versus 16½.

[3] Two hundred and forty-one offensive patrols were carried out on the Fourth Army front. Eight German machines crashed and two were shot down; six British failed to return. At night bombs were dropped on Prisches, Maroilles and Locquignol close behind the front.

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preparations particularly as regards bridging the canal and signal communications, and for the arrangement of the barrages. The 5th Cavalry Brigade (less one regiment), under Br.-General N. W. Haig, was allotted to the IX Corps, and one regiment of it to the XIII Corps. Battalions of the II Tank Brigade were distributed: to the IX Corps, the 10th (Mark V) also the 17th Armoured Car Battalion; to the XIII the 9th and 14th (Mark V); the 6th (Whippets) was kept in reserve.

No change was made in the allotment of artillery except that the brigades of the 2nd and 5th Australian Divisions and the VI and XII Australian (Army) Field Brigades would not be available. The guns were placed in position gradually, camouflaged and the greater part of them kept silent, normal artillery action being maintained until zero hour. Ammunition was dumped by degrees. In order to assist sound-ranging of the enemy's batteries during the five days previous to the attack, the artillery had from time to time completely silent periods of half an hour.

The IX Corps had a specially difficult task: the canal was, above the Lock No. 1, doubled by reservoirs, and below the lock by subsidiary streams, sometimes on both sides: Catillon, on the western bank in the middle of the sector, was still in German hands. Lieut.-General Braithwaite's plan was for the 1st and 32nd Divisions (Major-Generals E. P. Strickland and T. S. Lambert) first to attack across the waterway and form separate bridgeheads; subsequently the 1st Division would push on to the Army objective, guarding its right flank if the French XV Corps was behindhand, and the 32nd Division would swing its right forward to an intermediate or "secondary objective",[1] and later bring its left up to the Army objective, connecting with the XIII Corps at the south-east corner of Landrecies. In addition to the main crossings, secondary crossings and feints would be made. Each division was allotted three tanks of the 10th Battalion, and covering each division were 9 field artillery brigades, under Br.-Generals H. F. E. Lewin and J. A. Tyler, besides fourteen heavy brigades and three siege batteries, under Br.-General G. B. Mackenzie. The barrage

[1] Marked on Sketch 30.

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until the passage was secured would be slow, at the rate of a hundred yards in six minutes, with set pauses.

The 1st Division detailed the 2nd and 1st Brigades (Br.-Generals G. C. Kelly and L. L. Wheatley) for the main attack, and the 3rd Brigade (Br.-General E. G. St. Aubyn) (less a battalion) for a subsidiary attack against Catillon; feints and small attacks were to be made on the extreme right and left, over the reservoirs and against le Donjon.

The main crossing of the 2nd Brigade was made just below the lock north of the reservoirs. The night of the 3rd/4th November was dark with rain until about midnight, and then a thick mist which lasted until 9 a.m. settled in the valley. The assaulting troops were safely deployed, with the 409th Field Company R.E. carrying the bridges behind them, about three hundred yards from the canal; but then troubles began: the planks provided for the crossing of the subsidiary stream proved too short, and when at three minutes after Zero the leading waves and the bridge-carrying parties moved forward, first a few shells and then salvoes fell amongst them. A scene of some confusion ensued; but the bridges were picked up again and one was laid over the subsidiary stream, over which men of the leading battalion, the 2/R. Sussex, rushed and lined the canal bank to keep down the enemy's fire. A second bridge was hauled over, and by 6.10 a.m. laid across the lock, so that troops could pass to deal with the Germans in the houses near the lock.[1] It was now possible to throw more bridges and soon the whole of the 2/R. Sussex was across, followed by the 2/K.R.R.C. The resistance now became slight, a large number of prisoners were taken,[2] and the line of the bridgehead was reached by 9 a.m. During the pause of an hour and a half which followed ranks were reorganized, the 1/Northamptonshire arrived in support, and the XXV and XXXIV Brigades R.F.A. came forward to the canal. The subsidiary passage over the reservoirs attempted by a company of the K.R.R.C. was unsuccessful, as the wooden gangways had been damaged by shell-fire, and the collapsible boats provided to meet such an emergency could not be

[1] For exceptional bravery during these incidents, Captain (A/Lieut.-Colonel) D. G. Johnson, S. Wales Borderers, commanding the 2/R. Sussex, and Captain (A/Major) G. de C. E. Findlay, commanding the 409th Field Company R.E., were awarded the V.C.

[2] Of the *29th* and *19th Reserve Divisions*.

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used on account of machine-gun fire; the company eventually crossed by the bridges near the lock.

The 1st Brigade had more luck. At 4 a.m. when the 1/Cameron Highlanders and 1/L. North Lancashire, with the 23rd Field Company R.E. were deployed and dug-in behind four parallel hedges, they had a few casualties from a counter-preparation, but when the barrage lifted off the canal at 3 minutes after Zero, they were close up to the banks, and four bridges were quickly thrown near the southern bend of the canal. Both battalions were across by 6.10 a.m., with the enemy barrage falling behind them. Bois de l'Abbaye, with the many Germans in it, was seized by the Camerons. Many hand-to-hand encounters took place in the fog, between small parties, the enemy, however, surrendered freely. The line of the bridgehead was soon reached and the 1/Black Watch then crossed the canal in support.

At Catillon the 1/Gloucestershire of the 3rd Brigade, with three tanks (the crew of one was overcome by petrol fumes) had complete success: the Germans who had taken cover whilst the barrage passed over were caught as they tried to emerge from the cellars, and the battalion gained possession of the little town and its bridge, and formed a bridgehead beyond it, taking 450 Germans and their defence apparatus, at a cost of only 4 killed and 38 wounded. The 1/South Wales Borderers, which mopped up the outskirts, captured 123 prisoners at a cost of 5 killed and 16 wounded. On the right wing of the 1st Division, the 2/Welch (3rd Brigade) had no great difficulty in crossing and forming on the right sector of the bridgehead. The total losses of the 1st Division for the whole day were under five hundred, and their captures exceeded their casualties.[1]

[1] The regimental histories of the two divisions, the *29th* and *19th Reserve* and part of the *204th*, which were opposed to the 1st Division, have little to say, except that their artillery "was held down by superior weight", that the British broke through and appeared on the flanks and rear, and that at night the divisions were on a north-south line through Prisches, but that the survivors of the *112th Regiment* (*29th Division*) were collected at Petit Fayt, 3 miles east of that line. "Res. Regt. No. 78" (*19th Reserve Division*), which fought at the lock, has a good account of the hand-to-hand fighting there, revolvers accounting for most of the defenders except one, who shammed dead.

"Res. Regt. No. 71" (*22nd Reserve Division*, opposite the right of the 32nd Division) makes the statement that "a swarm of low-flying aero-planes accompanied the attack and sprayed the retreating infantry and artillery with machine-gun fire".

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The French divisions next to the British failed to cross the canal ;[1] but the next step of the 1st Division, the enlargement of the bridgehead, was proceeded with at 9.37 a.m., as provision had been made for the French hanging back. As the troops moved up the gentle slopes very little resistance and only slight machine-gun fire was encountered, shelling had practically ceased, and aeroplane observers reported that the Germans could be seen moving their guns back—they began to do so about 8 a.m. Here the " secondary objective " was practically occupied before noon, and a patrol of the R. Scots Greys went through the line to reconnoitre towards the la Justice–Viéville road, and, being heavily fired on from Viéville, guns were turned on to that village, and the Germans decamped. No sign of the French being visible at 11.30 a.m., the 138th Brigade (Br.-General F. G. M. Rowley) of the 46th Division (Major-General G. F. Boyd) was moved up to Rejet de Beaulieu, behind the canal crossing place, and the 5/Leicestershire crossed the canal to support the 2nd Brigade. To protect the right flank, shortly after 2 p.m., the 1/Northamptonshire attacked Fesmy, and cleared the village, except the eastern parts, where strong resistance was offered by machine guns. Just as this movement was launched information reached 2nd Brigade headquarters that the French would renew their attempt at 4 p.m. At this hour, therefore, the Northamptonshire continued their operation, the right of the 2/K.R.R.C. swinging forward to conform, and cleared Fesmy. Touch, however, could not be obtained with the French. Instead, therefore of going forward to the agreed junction at la Justice, which was visited by a patrol and yielded six German prisoners, the Northamptonshire formed a right defensive flank from the canal to the cross roads in Viéville. Their left also advanced slightly to keep contact with the rest of the 2nd Brigade. The final position was without touch with the French.[2]

[1] " In the centre and left [of the XV Corps] the 46th and 66th Divisions " encountered, as soon as they started, a very vigorous resistance, and " could not throw their footbridges ; nevertheless, the 66th Division " employing extemporized means, managed to cross to the east bank of " the canal, and about 11 a.m. to reach the western outskirts of Boué " [nearly 2 miles south of the international boundary]." F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 285.

[2] " At the end of the day the 66th Division arrived before Bergues." F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 285, but its situation map does not place it there until next day.

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The 1st Brigade also had little difficulty in reaching the secondary objective in the 9.37 a.m. attack, but then experienced heavy fire on the right and fell back a short distance; the northern exits of la Groise were also under fire for a time. On the left, Mezières made only a short resistance, and just before noon contact was established there with the 32nd Division; but it was not until after 5 p.m. that junction was made near the Army objective.

The attack of the 32nd Division was led by the 14th and 96th Brigades (Br.-Generals L. P. Evans and A. C. Girdwood) with the 206th and 218th Field Companies R.E. attached; the former was to cross the canal just south of Ors and the latter a thousand yards north of it, whilst five minutes after zero hour two platoons of the 5th/6th Royal Scots (14th Brigade), under a special barrage, were to attack le Donjon and, if possible, secure a crossing there. Although favoured by the mist, an endeavour to fill the gap in the Ors bridge by floating down a span on a pontoon, failed under heavy fire, and an attempt made north of this bridge, to cross by collapsible boats was also unsuccessful. Under rifle covering fire, however, the 206th Field Company R.E. managed to place a floating bridge supported on kerosene tins two hundred yards to the south of the permanent bridge, and the 1/Dorsetshire, pushing on a short way to cover the bridges, immediately after crossing, captured one hundred and fifty prisoners. The two platoons of the 5th/6th Royal Scots, being unable to approach le Donjon by the one marsh path available, half the battalion followed the Dorsetshire and took position on their right. Le Donjon did not fall until 10.45 a.m., after being attacked from the south.

The attempt of the 2/Manchester and 16/Lancashire Fusiliers to cross the canal north of Ors was unsuccessful. The 218th Field Company R.E. threw two bridges; but the southern one was smashed after two platoons had crossed, machine-gun fire prevented the use of the other, and over two hundred casualties were suffered.[1] Meantime, on the left the 15/Lancashire Fusiliers, with two companies of the 2/K.O.Y.L.I. (97th Brigade) attached—as the battalion was very weak after the fighting at Happegarbes two days

[1] V.C's were awarded to Captain (A/Major) A.H.C. Waters, commanding the 218th Field Company R.E. and Sapper A. Archibald of that unit, and posthumously to Lieut. (A/Lieut.-Colonel) J. N. Marshall (Irish Guards), commanding the 16/Lancashire Fusiliers, and 2/Lieut. J. Kirk, 2/Manchester.

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previously—cleared the area between the railway and the canal, and reached the western bank. At 8.30 a.m. divisional orders arrived for the 2/Manchester and 16/Lancashire Fusiliers to cross by the Dorsetshire bridge, and by midday two companies of the former were alongside the 14th Brigade. At 1.30 p.m. the third battalion of this brigade, the 15/Highland L.I., crossed, and an advance was made by the 1/Dorsetshire and 5th/6th Royal Scots to the bridgehead objective. Opposition was so slight that a barrage was not considered necessary and, on reaching the objective, the 15/Highland L.I. came up and all three battalions advanced to the corps secondary objective, checked only for a short time by fire from a farm. The Highland L.I. even went five hundred yards farther; but as the country was enclosed and by now darkness had fallen, the advance was stopped. The 16/Lancashire Fusiliers, on which most of the casualties at the bridges had fallen came up on the left and the 97th Brigade (Br.-General G. A. Armytage) was brought over the canal in support. The 15/Lancashire Fusiliers, crossing south-west of Landrecies in the 25th Division area, reached the front in touch with that division, but did not establish touch with the 2/Manchester, whose left was at Petit Versaille. The 32nd Division had taken 235 prisoners of three different divisions and of a cyclist brigade, but had suffered about 700 casualties.

The general line of the IX Corps ran therefore, with a refused right flank, from Fesmy to the Army objective, along this to the Mezières brook and thence back to and then along the corps secondary objective to the canal.

The XIII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir T. Morland) proposed in the first phase to reach the road which runs from Maroilles northwards to Locquignol, two miles beyond the Army objective.[1] The thick mist led to some loss of time and of direction in the enclosed country. The attack of the 25th Division (Major-General J. R. E. Charles) was led by the 75th Brigade, and the 74th was to pass through it at the

[1] The Corps divided its 13 field artillery brigades between the three divisions, the 50th Division receiving 5; each division had also one heavy brigade. Tanks were allotted, 4 (one failed to arrive) to the 25th Division; 10 to the 50th; 10 to the 18th; leaving 7 of the 31 in reserve. Each division also received 500 bill-hooks for cutting hedges.

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Army objective at 1.15 p.m., but not without divisional orders. The barrage in the first stage moved forward a hundred yards in six minutes which, in view of the heavy mist, was fortunate. The 75th Brigade (Br.-General C. W. Frizell) was on its mettle, as the other brigades did not think that the crossing could be achieved, and there was a battalion competition as to who should get over first. All possible preparations were made by the C.R.E., Lieut.-Colonel R. J. Done, and the brigade itself helped to carry the bridging stores two miles to the site. Rafts of petrol tins were launched by the 108th Field Company R.E. and a company of pioneers; but on the right the bridge over the old course of the Sambre was secured intact, an engineer sergeant jumping into the water and cutting the leads to the charges, and, scared by the barrage, the Germans fled from the canal, leaving a trestle bridge fit for field artillery and two footbridges undamaged. Machine-gun fire from Landrecies for a time held up the crossing, but as the barrage advanced this slackened and was then beaten down by covering fire. The undestroyed bridge over the canal was rushed by a company of the 1/8th Worcestershire from the support line as arranged, closely followed by a company of the 1/5th Gloucestershire, the original leaders, as far as the canal. Two tanks attached to the 32nd Division cleared up Happegarbes on the right flank. At 10.33 a.m. the advance of the right of the brigade was resumed under the barrage, and by 11.15 a.m. the Army objective had been reached, a complete field battery being captured en route.

In the centre of the 75th Brigade fire from the Faubourg Soyères delayed the advance, the barrage was lost and the main bridge into Landrecies was blown up by a mounted German officer, who was seen galloping down to fire the charge. On the left a long fight for fire supremacy took place, the three tanks (one of which was knocked out) giving great assistance and accounting for about forty machine guns. The enemy fire slackened towards 10 a.m., the line was pushed forward to the railway, and two platoons of the 8/R. Warwickshire crossed the canal by a wooden bridge, north of the demolished main bridge. Other men were ferried over under fire from Landrecies on the petrol rafts, and just before 11 a.m. on this flank, also the Army objective was reached. Pressure from north and south gradually forced the Germans to leave Landrecies, the 105th

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Field Company R.E., brought up light bridges, and by 12.45 p.m. the 1/8th Worcestershire was mopping up the town; two companies went on to the Army objective, capturing two field batteries on the way. The Germans were now in full retreat, leaving 838 prisoners, 27 guns and other spoil in the hands of the 75th Brigade.[1] A number of Germans also surrendered to two supply tanks, mistaking them for fighting machines.

At 11.40 a.m. the 74th Brigade (Br.-General H. M. Craigie-Halkett) by divisional orders, sent forward one battalion, the 11/Sherwood Foresters, to support the 75th, and it formed an outpost line about a mile in front of the Army objective, capturing two field howitzers, a field gun and 25 prisoners in the process.

At 2.45 p.m. the 25th Division received a telephone message from the XIII Corps saying that, as the 32nd Division (IX Corps) on the divisional right was not yet up to the objective, it was to form a defensive flank. This was done, and the two remaining battalions of the 74th Brigade were at the same time ordered forward to the left of the 75th Brigade to seize the crossings of the Petite Helpe river. The 9/Green Howards, followed by the 13/Durham L.I., began to cross the canal at 3.30 p.m.; but it was too late in the day to reach the stream, and a line about a mile beyond the Army objective was occupied with outposts well to the front. The Green Howards also passed through the enemy's artillery line and had taken two field batteries and an 8-inch howitzer during the advance. The 7th Brigade (Br.-General C. J. Hickie) after mopping up the area west of the river in the evening, sent one battalion to the front line. The 25th Division had enjoyed a wholly successful day.

The 150th Brigade (Br.-General G. Rollo) the left brigade of the 50th Division, had the Forest of Mormal in front of it; its sister brigade, the 149th, on the right, had enclosed country, and beyond the Army objective, the canal. The barrage for the former brigade, using only shrapnel through the unfelled timber in the forest, went straight on to beyond the Army objective; that for the latter made about an hour's pause on reaching the canal in order to cover its

[1] Lance-Corporal W. Amey, 1/8th R. Warwickshire, was awarded the V.C. for great gallantry and initiative.

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passage. A machine-gun barrage was also maintained on the Hirondelle brook, and down the rides of the forest. The two brigades experienced heavy shelling, both high explosive and gas, from 5.45 a.m. onwards, that is as soon as the IX Corps started, and when they went forward at 6.15 a.m. at once met with opposition, which for a time was effective. On the right the 3/Royal Fusiliers and 13/Black Watch, with the assistance of seven tanks (two others had been ditched and the crew of another all gassed)[1], managed to overcome the well-arranged machine-gun defence. Then the resistance gradually weakened and the Germans, followed by two armoured cars as far as the first objective (one was hit and overturned), cleared off, leaving machine guns and other apparatus behind ; but the resistance stiffened again as the canal was approached. In the forest the enemy was either surprised or let the 7/Wiltshire and 2/Northumberland Fusiliers (150th Brigade) through in the hope of cutting them off ; in any case, his troops were taken in flank by the 18th Division from the north, and retired in confusion.

The 149th Brigade (Br.-General P. M. Robinson) reached the Army objective by 11 a.m. and the 150th was alongside before midday. In rear of the advance two companies of the 2/R. Munster Fusiliers (150th Brigade) had at 8.15 a.m. begun to move forward northwards along the western edge of the forest, protected by a very accurate artillery barrage, to make junction with parties from the 18th Division and establish liaison posts. This was successfully accomplished, and the companies were later withdrawn. The other two companies mopped up the area between the old front line and the forest, the 6/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers (151st Brigade, but actually with the 150th) being employed to capture a farm half a mile south-east of Robersart, and then occupy Rosimbois, at the south-western corner of the forest. The 2/R. Dublin Fusiliers (149th Brigade), following half a mile in rear of the advance, had become involved in the fighting ; but in the afternoon it occupied a spur about three thousand yards north-east of Landrecies in a loop of the Sambre, in order according to plan, to help the 25th Division by fire ; but this assistance was found unnecessary, and during the night the battalion established two bridgehead posts across the river.

[1] This tank was then manned by a scratch crew from the 2/R. Dublin Fusiliers, and caught up the infantry at 8.50 a.m. and did good service.

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About 10 a.m. the reports which had reached Major-General Jackson seemed to show that resistance on the left flank was considerably weaker than on the right; so he ordered the 151st Brigade (Br.-General R. E. Sugden)—the 6/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers joining it en route—his reserve, already moved up from Bousies to the western edge of the forest, to push on at all speed on the left of the 150th Brigade to the Army objective, preparatory to continuing the advance to the Maroilles–Locquignol road. By 1.15 p.m. the brigade, moving along the rides in the forest in three columns, had carried out his orders. It continued to make good progress, opposed only by machine-gunners, and a little before dusk dug in, by divisional instructions, a little short of the objective road. The two leading brigades of the 50th Division had captured just under two hundred prisoners, six field guns, 10 baggage wagons, besides many machine guns.

The attack of the 18th Division (Major-General R. P. Lee) was carried out in three stages. First, two battalions, the 11/Royal Fusiliers (54th Brigade, Lieut.-Colonel K. C. Weldon, acting) and 7/R. West Kent (53rd Brigade, Br.-General M. G. H. Barker), aided by six tanks (one was ditched and another received a direct hit and was put out of action), fought their way to a line just inside the edge of the forest, which they reached soon after 8 a.m., although Hecq, on the left, was not finally cleared until 9.45 a.m. The straggling village of Preux aux Bois, on the right, was specially dealt with by six companies of the 54th Brigade (2/Bedfordshire and one company each of the 11/Royal Fusiliers and 6/Northamptonshire), with three tanks (a fourth was ditched), under an enfilade barrage which moved southward from the northern end. By 8 a.m. they had begun to fight their way into the village, which lay in a labyrinth of hedges and orchards; but even with the assistance by fire of the 50th Division on the south, it was noon before all the machine guns had been mastered and contact established with the 50th Division; and even then many posts remained to be cleaned up.[1]

Before the second part of the divisional attack to the Army objective was carried out, several field artillery brigades and

[1] The rifle strength of the 54th Brigade was only 42 officers and 1,015 other ranks: it lost 7 officers and 183 other ranks and took 810 prisoners and 70 machine guns.

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heavy brigades affiliated to divisions were moved forward, congestion on the roads preventing more being advanced. The attack was made by the 10/Essex and 8/R. Berkshire of the 53rd Brigade (whose battalions averaged 300 rifles), and they left the old front line with six of the reserve tanks (one was ditched and one hit) at 7.35 a.m. Owing to the enemy still being in possession of Preux aux Bois, it was 11.15 a.m. before the Essex, led by the acting commander, found a gap of two hundred yards between two German posts in the northern enclosures of the village; they then worked southwards behind the German front line and deployed facing east. Although now confronted by machine-guns the battalion went on and, after stiff fighting, reached the Army objective about 2.30 p.m., and advanced beyond it to the track in the forest called the Route du Pont Routier, in order to keep touch with the 50th Division. The two leading companies of the 8/R. Berkshire had, in spite of some shelling at first and point-blank gun fire at the end, reached the Army objective four hours earlier and, though isolated, held on, the other two companies joining in the advance of the Essex.

The battalions of the 55th Brigade (Lieut.-Colonel A. P. B. Irwin (acting)) the reserve, should have advanced from the Army objective at 11.30 a.m., but, owing to the position at Preux aux Bois had to work their way forward gradually; so it was 3.30 p.m. before they left the Army objective. Progress was then rapid, as the German resistance was broken, and about 6 p.m., after a machine-gun fight on the right, the Maroilles–Locquignol road was reached. An hour later brigade outposts had been put out east of the road. The XIII Corps, therefore, was everywhere beyond the Army objective: the 18th Division had reached, and the 50th Division very nearly reached, the farther corps objective.

The Fourth Army had forced the passage of the Sambre and Oise canal and established a bridgehead 15 miles long and averaging 2½ miles in depth, whilst, farther north it had made an advance of 3½ miles. Over four thousand prisoners (IX Corps, 1,936; XIII Corps, 2,200) and eighty guns had been captured.

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THE THIRD ARMY[1]

In accordance with G.H.Q. warning order of the 29th, and with information as to the intentions of the Fourth and First Armies, General Byng at a conference on the 30th October gave as the general objective of the Third Army a line of high ground from Locquignol northwards through the Forest of Mormal and then slightly north-west between Frasnoy and Gommegnies to a point of junction with the First Army about a mile north-east of Jenlain. Zero hour for the right of the V Corps was to be 6.15 a.m., the same as that of the XIII Corps of the Fourth Army; but for the rest of the Third Army, 5.30 a.m., the same as that of the First Army. Corps were warned to be prepared to continue operations on the 5th and subsequent days to a long straight road running through Pont sur Sambre and Bavai. The IV Corps, however, was not to storm the ancient fortress of le Quesnoy, only to surround it. Air reconnaissances revealed a good deal of new work on the whole front, chiefly lines of rifle pits and gun emplacements organized in very great depth.

Tanks of the II Brigade were allotted to corps as follows:

V Corps, 8 (Mark V) of the 9th Battalion (3 were allotted to each of the 2 attacking divisions).

IV Corps, 5 (Mark V) of the 14th Battalion (all to the 37th Division).

VI Corps, 12 (whippets) of the 6th Battalion.

For work on roads and bridges and removing obstacles and booby traps, each corps had about 2 Army Troops companies R.E., 4 Tunnelling companies R.E. and 4 Labour companies, with an Army Troops company for water supply.

The average strength of a division was about 8,000 instead of 13,000, infantry battalions being about half establishment and machine-gun battalions three-quarters.

Both the V Corps (Lieut.-General C. D. Shute) and the IV Corps (Lieut.-General Sir M. Harper) gave as objective a line in the Forest of Mormal, about nine thousand yards distant, which ran about six hundred yards east of Locquignol and then northward, that is a little in advance of the Army

[1] See Sketch 36.
Fourteen German divisions were identified on the Third Army front (15 divisions) on 4th November, mostly of the *Second Army*, which had 8 tired divisions in reserve.

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objective. Three intermediate objectives were interpolated—the Army objective becoming the third. In both corps the general plan was that, after the first objective had been taken fresh troops should capture the second, when a pause of two hours was to be made to allow time for the artillery to come forward, moving by batteries. A second body of fresh troops was then to take the third and fourth objectives. Owing to the oblique lie of the western boundary of the Forest of Mormal, the troops on the right would have more woodland to traverse than those on the left; but the area between the jumping-off line, and the forest was a tangle of orchards and stiff wired hedges, more difficult to attack through than the trees and undergrowth of the forest, in which the numerous rides would help the keeping of direction.

The artillery of the V Corps, under Br.-General R. P. Benson, consisted of ten brigades of field artillery and five of heavy.[1] The barrage as far as the second objective, advancing only 100 yards in six minutes, was to be 300 yards ahead of the infantry, who were warned not to attempt to follow it too closely in the forest, as the tops of trees were liable to be hit and brought down anywhere within three hundred yards of the spot where the shells would normally strike the ground. After taking part in the barrage the machine guns were to be attached by companies to the infantry brigades. When the second objective was reached, one brigade of field artillery was to be allotted to the leading brigade of each division for close support, and sections of guns and some mobile heavy trench-mortars to each of the leading battalions[2]; their support was to take the form of short sudden concentrations of fire on the edges of woods or clearings, or sunken roads and ditches; as the other batteries came forward, these would continue the barrage. The usual arrangements were made for contact and counter-attack aeroplanes.

[1] The XIII, XVII, XXII, LIV and LVIII Brigades R.G.A. under Br.-General A. M. Tyler. The 60-pdrs fired in the barrage, which was mostly shrapnel, but included some high explosive and thermit.

With the 38th Division were the brigades of the 33rd and 38th Divisions and 1 Army brigade, under Br.-General T. E. Topping. With the 17th Division were the brigades of the 17th and 21st Divisions and one Army brigade under Br.-General P. Wheatley.

[2] Some mobile medium trench-mortars, however, were with brigades from the start, in addition to their own Stokes mortars

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The 38th and 17th Divisions (Major-Generals T. A. Cubitt and P. R. Robertson) went forward, with the 5th and 42nd in support. The early morning mist, which cleared about 9 a.m., enabled the attackers to get close to the enemy's forward machine guns without being seen. It had been specially impressed on the infantry officers of the 38th Division that in thick woods loss of direction and control was to be expected, and that extensions aggravated the difficulties; advances were therefore to be made on narrow fronts by companies under the personal leading of the company commander, and, if considered necessary, by battalions under the battalion commander, with one company as advanced guard. Pockets of the enemy would probably be left behind, but this was not to be allowed to delay the advance, which should be as rapid as possible, as the pockets would be mopped up by following troops. A special look-out was to be kept for gas.

The 115th Brigade (Br.-General H. D. de Pree) led the attack of the 38th Division to the first objective, with all three battalions in line. A large number of strong clippers were carried to cut through the wired hedges, and the tanks of the 9th Battalion assisted in breaking these down, but did not enter the forest. Except for a few machine guns, easily overcome, there was little resistance. At 9 a.m. the 113th Brigade (Br.-General H. E. ap Rhys-Pryce) passed through, having suffered some casualties from gun-fire during assembly. As previously settled, it attacked the two extremities of the line first and then mopped up the space between, with the result that the second objective was captured up to time and ten field guns taken. The advance from this objective to the third and fourth was continued by the 114th Brigade (Br.-General T. R. C. Price), beginning at 12.30 p.m. on the left and following later on the right, so as to keep touch with both the Fourth Army and the 17th Division, which had different zero hours. By 5.15 p.m. the 38th Division had occupied the fourth objective, and its patrols reported that the enemy was not in any strength; so at 2.30 a.m. (5th November) by Major-General Cubitt's instructions, two companies of the 13/R. Welch Fusiliers (113th Brigade), went on and occupied a line on the eastern edge of the forest. A patrol of the battalion entered Berlaimont, a thousand yards ahead, and captured sixty prisoners without a fight. The total taken by the division was about

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five hundred, with 23 field guns, and its own casualties were about six hundred.

The 17th Division sent forward the 52nd Brigade (Br.-General W. Allason), after a hundred oil drums had been discharged by "N" Special Company R.E. on the road junction at the corner of the forest twelve hundred yards north-east of Englefontaine. Enemy artillery fire was heavy on the forming-up position, and in the tangle of orchards and hedges west of the forest the resistance was obstinate—prisoners said later that no order for retirement had been received. Only one tank was available, and it was soon hit. Considerable casualties were sustained, the 9/Duke of Wellington's, in the centre, losing 13 officers and 226 other ranks out of 15 and 583 in action; but all three battalions reached the first objective, about two-thirds of which were in the forest and one-third outside, up to time. The 51st Brigade (Br.-General R. M. Dudgeon) then passed through and, the enemy's opposition having evidently been broken, it reached the second objective, entirely in the forest, though partly in clearing, without difficulty. The 50th Brigade (Br.-General J. F. R. Hope), leaving this objective at 1 p.m., 30 minutes after the 38th Division, had little trouble in reaching the third objective west of the Locquignol clearing. Here fire on the right from Locquignol and from the left, where the IV Corps was not yet up, prevented much further progress during daylight, and a definite line for the night was occupied to enable the barrage for next day to be calculated. About 11.30 p.m. a patrol of the 10/West Yorkshire found Locquignol evacuated; as on the left touch had been obtained with the IV Corps, and as the 21st Division, which was to pass through, informed Major-General Robertson that it intended to attack without a barrage, he ordered the advance to the fourth objective to be continued, and it was reached without opposition between 6 and 7 a.m. (5th) just in time for the 21st Division to pass through. Thus the V Corps had secured the whole of its final objective, and on the right a little more.

The IV Corps employed the 37th Division (Major-General H. Bruce Williams) and the New Zealand Division (Major-

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General Sir A. H. Russell). The supporting artillery consisted of twelve field and five heavy brigades under Br.-General J. G. Geddes.[1]

Up to the second objective, all the ground to be traversed, except the extreme south corner, was outside the forest. Four objectives were fixed, corresponding to those of the V Corps. Other technical details were also similar, except that the pace of the barrage from the first objective was to be a hundred yards in four minutes instead of in six; but, as Le Quesnoy was to be encircled and not assaulted, the second objective of the New Zealand Division was about two thousand yards short of that of the V Corps: the connecting line between the two corps, to be held by the 37th Division, at first continued the objective of the V Corps, but then dropped back, passing by the east and north of Jolimetz, to join on to the New Zealand Division. The irregularity in the lines of the first and second objectives made the barrage table a somewhat complicated one.

In the 37th Division, the 111th Brigade (Br.-General S. G. Francis) on a two-battalion front, passed through the 63rd (Br.-General A. B. Hubback), which was in the line and was then assembled in reserve. At Zero Q Special Company R.E. projected oil drums into Louvignies, but considerable resistance came from this locality and from the railway east of Ghissignies. Hand-to-hand fighting took place in the orchards, but the right was on the first objective to time at 8.15 a.m. Louvignies, with 240 prisoners, was taken about the same hour, but the left, which met with stiffer resistance, was not up in line until nearly 9 a.m. Of the four tanks (the fifth had broken down) which had come up at daylight, two did good service on the railway near Ghissignies (one being put out of action by a hit), and one was equally useful in Louvignies.

The 112th Brigade (Br.-General W. N. Herbert), with the 8/Somerset L.I. (63rd Brigade) attached, was ready to pass through at 8.47 a.m. Its right did so; but its left, having to

[1] The V, LVI, LVII, XC and XCII R.G.A., under Br.-General T. E. Marshall.

With the 37th Division, the field brigades of the 5th and 37th Divisions and 1 Army brigade, under Br.-General F. Potts.

With the New Zealand Division, the field brigades of the 42nd and N.Z. Divisions, and three Army brigades (1 New Zealand), under Br.-General G. N. Johnston.

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wait until the first objective was secured, lost the barrage and was delayed; the centre was held up by machine-gun fire from the orchards. About noon, with good assistance from a tank, Jolimetz was taken by the 2/Essex, and resistance then collapsed, the enemy beginning to surrender freely; so by 3 p.m. both the second and third objectives, mostly in the forest, had been captured. At 5 p.m. the advance was resumed. Progress was slow, on account of the thick undergrowth and resistance by machine guns, and the oncoming darkness soon made it impossible to keep touch and give mutual assistance. But in the end the 8/Somerset L.I. and 13/Royal Fusiliers passed the Army objective and nearly reached the corps objective.

The New Zealand Division, opposite Le Quesnoy,[1] had the 3rd (Rifle) Brigade (Br.-General H. E. Hart) in the line, the battalions being the 1st, 4th and 2nd, with the 3rd in support to go through at the first objective.[2] The town was enclosed by a seven-sided bastion enceinte, with a covered way tenaille (a continuous rampart of salients and re-entrants) outside it, the space between the two lines forming a dry ditch with mounds of earth, with trees growing on them, scattered over it. The plan of attack was that after 300 cylinders of oil had been projected on to the ramparts by Q Special Company R.E., the brigade should close on the town under the barrage, its wings pushing forward south and north of it to a preliminary objective. The artillery was then to search the ramparts, but cease fire on the western side after fifteen minutes, whilst patrols ascertained whether the fortifications were still occupied. If the patrols were unable to penetrate, smoke shell was to be fired on the ramparts from 6.30 to 8.30 a.m. Meanwhile, at 7.29 a.m., the 1st N.Z. Rifle Battalion, south of the town, was to advance to the first objective with the 37th Division, which was timed to reach it at 8.1 a.m.; and north of the town the 1st New Zealand Brigade (Br.-General C. W. Melvill) was to pass through the 2nd N.Z. Rifle Battalion, and go with the 62nd Division on the left to the first objective, both parties forming a flank facing Le Quesnoy as they progressed. This programme and the advance to the second objective,

[1] See Sketch 38.

[2] The strength of the brigade was 7 officers and 969 other ranks, about one-third of establishment, so companies were organized in 3 platoons.

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reached from ten to twenty minutes after 10 a.m., met with very little opposition and were duly carried out. The 1st New Zealand Brigade then extended past the eastern side of Le Quesnoy and took over the whole of the divisional front. It then continued on to the third objective, where it arrived shortly before 12.30 p.m., reporting very little resistance and its patrols, which went into the forest, finding no sign of the enemy.

Fire had continued to come from Le Quesnoy, particularly from snipers in the trees in the dry ditch ; but about 8 a.m. a n.c.o. and three men of the 2nd N.Z. Rifle Battalion crossed the ditch, and climbed the rampart, capturing a machine gun, but then were forced to return. A platoon, under the covering fire of another platoon, reached the ditch but could do no more than remain there. About 1 p.m. a prisoner was sent into the town to suggest surrender, later others were sent, and a formal message demanding surrender was dropped by aeroplane. The situation at 3.30 p.m. was that the German rank and file were willing to surrender, some attempting to leave the town to do so, but the officers were not. About 4 p.m. trench mortars were turned on to the western ramparts, and soon after the leaders of the 4th N.Z. Rifle Battalion, by means of a single ladder, gained the top of the ramparts, and were followed by the rest of the battalion ; a party of the 2nd N.Z. Rifle Battalion also got into the town over the road bridge which had been only partially destroyed. Le Quesnoy then surrendered, with 711 men. As the 3rd New Zealand Brigade had earlier captured 532, the total garrison had been 1,243 plus its casualties 43 killed, 251 wounded.

Some doubt had arisen as to whether the 1st New Zealand Brigade should go on to the fourth objective. One battalion did so and then fell back ; but by 1.30 a.m. (5th) two battalions had secured it. The 1st New Zealand Brigade had in the 24 hours captured, besides its prisoners, four 8-inch howitzers ; 42, 4·2-inch guns ; 26 field guns. The total for the division came to over 2,450 prisoners, with 34 more field guns, and for the IV Corps to 3,500 prisoners and 110 guns. Among the captured men were several who were able and willing to assist in the removal of mines and booby traps in the captured area. The 4th November, 1918, was for the New Zealand Division one of the most outstanding days of the War.

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The final objective of the VI and XVII Corps corresponded with the third objective of the V and IV Corps, being the true Army objective. Two intermediate objectives, continuations of the first and second objectives of the other corps, were selected. The attack of the two corps was entirely successful.

The VI Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Haldane) employed the 62nd and Guards Divisions (Major-Generals Sir R. Whigham and T. G. Matheson), which had come into the line on the night of the 2nd/3rd November, the 2nd and 3rd Divisions being ordered to follow in support. As the Guards Division had gained ground on the 3rd during the Valenciennes operations, and was already on the first objective, it was to advance at 6 a.m., whilst the 62nd Division was to start at the Army zero hour at 5.30 a.m. Patrols sent out during the night reported the German line still strongly held, and no signs of withdrawal, although some were reported on the XVII Corps front. Both divisions employed two brigades, and a fresh battalion for each of the successive objectives. Lieut.-General Haldane kept the 12 whippets in reserve with the corps cavalry, as he considered that they would be of little use on the first day of the battle.

The artillery support, under Br.-General J. G. Rotton, was provided by 9 brigades of field artillery and 5 of heavy.[1] There was to be no long halt on the second objective, the pause was to be as short as possible, not exceeding 15 minutes. It was left to the divisions, on reaching each objective, to order forward such artillery as was required, and a field brigade was advanced to support each brigade, one per division having pushed on after the first objective had been gained.

The country to be traversed rose gently, and was cut into spurs by four small streams, which ran across the front. Of these the westernmost, the Rhonelle, was passable by vehicles only at the bridges, which were down, or at a ford

[1] With the 62nd Division, under Br.-General A. T. Anderson, those of the 3rd and 62nd Divisions, one Army field brigade, and the LXXXIV R.G.A.

With the Guards Division, those of the Guards and 2nd Division, and the LXIII R.G.A. under Br.-General F. A. Wilson.

The XXXIX, LX and LXXII R.G.A. remained under Br.-General A. Ellershaw.

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south-west of Villers Pol. The Petite Aunelle (which runs into the Aunelle below Eth), though deep cut, with 30-foot banks in places, had but little water in it. The other two streams were unimportant. The area contained a number of villages surrounded by orchards and fields enclosed by hedges or wire, but few woods. Most of the roads were sunken, and had as much as two feet of mud in them. The ground it would be thought favoured the defence; but in the event its difficulties aided the better soldiers, for the enclosures enabled the West Riding men and the Guards to manœuvre round and outflank the defenders.

The 186th, 187th (Br.-Generals J. L. G. Burnett and A. J. Reddie), 2nd Guards and 1st Guards Brigades (Br.-Generals B. N. Sergison-Brooke and C. R. Champion de Crespigny) led the attack: their start was hampered by enemy counter-preparation and the shelling of Villers Pol, and was embarrassed not only by the thick mist but by the smoke which blew over from Le Quesnoy. Resistance was at first slight, but stiffened as the advance proceeded, the 1st Guards Brigade, in particular, being held up by machine-gun fire from the wood south-west of Wargnies le Petit.

On approaching the final objective about 11 a.m. a good many enemy troops and guns were seen, and the defence seemed concentrated near it. Conditions for an immediate attack were not favourable. Although Orsival had been easily cleared and Frasnoy also after a short struggle, machine guns in the houses round Gommegnies and Preux au Sart had offered resistance, and as Le Quesnoy had not yet surrendered and blocked the 62nd Division supply road, the replenishment of ammunition and other battle traffic by a roundabout route through the Guards area, part of which was under fire from Le Quesnoy, was slow and the road soon became packed with traffic.

It had been arranged that at the final objective, the 185th Brigade (Br.-General Viscount Hampden) and the 3rd Guards Brigade (Br.-General C. P. Heywood) should pass through to exploit the success gained, and by 2 p.m. the former was assembled at la Belle Maison, about two thousand yards west of Frasnoy, and the same distance north of Le Quesnoy, and the latter at Villers Pol; but, in view of the situation, at 8.45 p.m. the divisions were ordered to postpone their advance until 6 a.m. next day.

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About 4.30 p.m., however, the enemy resistance had seemed to weaken, and the 1st Guards Brigade on the left had pushed through to the eastern outskirts of Preux au Sart, and after dusk the other three of the attacking brigades advanced to what they thought was the final objective, but was actually a couple of hundred yards short of it.

The 186th Brigade took 458 prisoners 2 field guns and nine 4·2-inch howitzers; the 187th Brigade, 378 prisoners, one 8-inch howitzer, one 6-inch and two 4·2-inch guns; by 6 p.m. the Guards Division had taken 650 prisoners, with "more coming in" and 9 field guns.

The XVII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. Fergusson) had already reached the first objective on the 3rd, so it had only two to capture, and its 24th and 19th Divisions (Major-Generals A. C. Daly and G. D. Jeffreys) went forward with the Guards Division at 6 a.m. They were supported by ten field artillery brigades and five heavy under Br.-General E. H. Willis.[1] In front lay the deep-cut Petite Aunelle stream, with the large villages of Wargnies le Petit and Wargnies le Grand on the slopes of the valley on the far side, and north of them continuous orchards; beyond these again was an open spur, with the villages of Bry and Eth below on the Aunelle. In spite of these difficulties of ground, complete success was gained. The 24th Division used only one brigade, the 73rd (Br.-General R. J. Collins). The 9/R. Sussex led in artillery formation, with the 7/Northamptonshire in support. It met with much opposition, especially on the extreme right, where, as on the left of the Guards Division, machine-gun fire from the woods checked it, and it was not until 11 a.m. that the enemy was driven from the Petite Aunelle. Steady progress was made by the patrols of all three battalions, the 7/Northamptonshire and 13/Middlesex being sent by brigade order to work round Wargnies le Grand by the south and north, and then relieve the troops of the 19th Division there. At 4.30 p.m. a combined attack, in co-operation with the 19th Division, was

[1] 24th Division, the brigades of the 24th and 61st Divisions, 1 Army field brigade and the LXII R.G.A. under Br.-General H. G. Lloyd.
19th Division, the brigades of the 19th and 20th Divisions, 1 Army brigade and the XXXV R.G.A. under Br.-General E. J. R. Peel.
Heavy Group: LXVI, LXXXVI and "Cotters" under Br.-General N. G. Barron.

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made under a barrage, and by 6 p.m. Wargnies le Petit and the final objective had been secured. As the 19th Division was close to Bry, the left went forward and occupied a sunken road leading into the village beyond the objective. The captures of the division amounted to 315 prisoners and two field guns.

The success of the 19th Division, which sent forward the 56th and 58th Brigades (Br.-Generals R. M. Heath and A. E. Glasgow) was attained somewhat differently. They had to start from Jenlain, and enemy fire on this village from 5.30 a.m. onwards delayed the support battalions; but the Petite Aunelle was crossed by the leading battalions, the 9/Cheshire (56th), the 9/Welch, and 2/Wiltshire (58th) which had to increase its front as it went forward. Over a hundred prisoners and a field gun were captured west of the stream. Considerable machine-gun fire was then encountered; but before the attacking infantry could close on them, the crews in most cases ran away, abandoning their weapons. Machine guns were now pushed forward, and a footing gained on the high ground north-east and north of Wargnies le Grand, close to the second objective. The 8/North Staffordshire (56th Brigade) then passed through and, though it lost the barrage, it took the northern part of the village, in the divisional sector, and as the 24th Division was not yet up, a company commander of the 9/Cheshire cleared the rest of it, taking a considerable number of prisoners.

Artillery support dying down whilst the batteries were coming forward, the enemy now opened fire from Bry and Eth and the high ground east of those villages. Patrols sent forward to seize the passages of the Aunelle were unable to do so, and a later attempt by two platoons of the 2/Wiltshire to clear Eth also failed. The 24th Division, on the right, had not at this time crossed the Petite Aunelle, and the XXII Corps, on the left, was, between noon and 1 p.m., driven back by a counter-attack; so Major-General Jeffreys, at 2.30 p.m. whilst the artillery concentrated bursts on selected targets, arranged for a renewal of the attack at 4.30 p.m. to gain the north-south road running through Bry. The 8/North Staffordshire (56th Brigade) gained its objective without encountering much opposition, and at the cost of only a few casualties. The attack of the

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divisions of the XXII Corps (First Army) on the left did not take place, and the 58th Brigade met with severe opposition from the moment it started; in spite of casualties, the 9/Welch reached the objective road, and the 2/Wiltshire captured Eth, but could progress no farther, and so formed a left defensive flank.

The Third Army's objective had, therefore, been reached on its whole front, in places overpassed, and little more than the advanced guards of eight of its fifteen divisions had been engaged.

The First Army[1]

The orders of General Horne to the XXII and Canadian Corps were to continue the operations begun on the 1st November, which on the 3rd had become a pursuit by advanced guards. He gave the Bavai–Hensies road as ultimate objective. The VIII Corps, held up on the western bank of the Schelde, was to stand fast.

The enemy retired during the night (3rd/4th), and the first task was to re-establish contact. The XXII Corps continued to employ the 11th and 56th Divisions, and they respectively sent forward the 32nd and 33rd Brigades and the 169th and 168th Brigades at 5.30 a.m., preceded by cavalry and cyclists. The troops crossed the Aunelle, two thousand yards ahead, which here runs in a small, thickly inhabited, closely cultivated valley, and took the villages of le Triez, Sébourg (where three British tanks were recovered) and Sébourquiaux in the face of some opposition; but when the vanguards appeared on the high ground on the eastern bank they were received with artillery and machine-gun fire in front and flank, counter-attacked at two places and compelled to drop back into the valley. It was then arranged that an organized attack by the two divisions should be made at 5 p.m.; but later, to ensure that all

[1] See Sketch 37.

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the artillery should be up, the attack of the XXII Corps was postponed until next morning.

In the Canadian Corps, the 4th and 3rd Canadian Divisions had sent forward the 11th, 12th and 8th Brigades, preceded by patrols, the 8th having to act as flank guard. The centre of Onnaing was reached by the 12th Canadian Brigade by 6.30 a.m., but the enemy was soon discovered entrenched on the line Rombies–Quarouble–Vicq, evidently prepared to make a fairly determined stand, and the batteries attached to the brigades were brought up to deal with the situation. By noon the troops of the 4th Canadian Division were in the outskirts of Rombies and Quarouble ; but a slag heap between Onnaing and Vicq was giving the 8th Canadian Brigade much trouble. During the afternoon patrols succeeded in entering Rombies and the slag heap was taken (it was lost again at 8 p.m.), but enemy machine guns in the western outskirts of Quarouble prevented any advance in that quarter, as H.E. shell could not be used against them for fear of injury to the civil inhabitants, nor could Vicq be approached. Here also it seemed an organized attack was necessary, and it was fixed for 5.30 a.m. (5th), in co-operation with the XXII Corps.

NOTE I

THE FRENCH AND AMERICANS ON 4TH NOVEMBER

(Sketch 21)

The American First Army continued to make good progress on the 4th ; the French Fourth Army [right to left, IX, XIV and XI Corps] advanced only a little on the right. The following is the F.O.A. Account : " On the 4th November, the IX and XIV " Corps began to advance again [that is, the XI Corps, on the " left made no attempt to move], but the enemy infantry and " artillery reacted vigorously, rendering any movement of the " 120th (IX), 163rd and 22nd (XIV) Divisions impossible. On " the right the 40th Division (IX) was unable to go beyond " Basancourt Farm and canal ". [Carte 11 shows that Basancourt Farm was captured on the 3rd ; the canal was a thousand yar

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ahead on the left wing]. A small advance west of le Chesne shown on Carte 11 is not mentioned in the text. The account goes on: "Slightly in advance of the Fourth Army, the "Americans occupied . . . .".

The French Fifth and Third Armies and the right wing of the First did not move; the left wing of the First Army, as mentioned in the text, could not get forward in the early part of the day, but came up abreast of the British Fourth Army at night.

NOTE II

The Germans on 4th November

Regimental histories agree that the divisions of the right of the *Second Army* (*LXI Corps*) were in the evening of the 4th ordered back to the line Prisches–Maroilles, and that they retired by bounds. Probably the order applied to the whole of the *Second Army*, as its left had disappeared from the French First Army by next morning. B.O.A. (p. 569)[1] says "on the night of "the 4th/5th November the retirement of the *Second Army* "into the Antwerp–Meuse Position was begun, and on the follow- "ing day was extended *en echelon* from the left to the *Seventeenth*, "*Sixth* and *Fourth Armies*".[2] This position "joined at Termonde "to the Antwerp defences, followed the line of the Dendre to "Ninove and then took the direction of Nivelles and Charleroi". From Charleroi it passed through the Ardennes behind the Meuse to Mezières and Sedan, beyond which, still behind the Meuse, it ran into the Brunhild position, a continuation of the Hermann Position, along the north side of the Argonne.

On the morning of the 6th November Gallwitz Group of Armies received the following order from O.H.L.:

"The A.–M. [Antwerp–Meuse] movement—in co-operation "with the movements already under way—will be carried "out". (Gallwitz, p. 457).

The retirement therefore extended to all the German Armies, for one reason, according to Gallwitz, that a traffic breakdown on the railways was imminent. They should, in the opinion of General Gröner (Max, ii, p. 293), have been withdrawn earlier to

[1] See End-paper B.

[2] Colonel Immanuel in "Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918", p. 301, says: "On 4th November the German Army went to the Antwerp-Meuse "position, as the threat against its southern wing from the Verdun "direction [the American First Army] grew stronger".

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the Antwerp–Meuse line and should not have lingered on the Hermann Position, but they were left there for political reasons, in order not to prejudice the armistice negotiations, and for administrative reasons, in the hope of gaining time to bring back 80,000 wounded and immense quantities of material and stores.

The internal state of Germany is dealt with in a Note at the end of Chapter XXXI.

Under the impression produced by the reports of the events of the day and the forcing of the Sambre (Hermann Position II). soon after midnight (12.40 a.m. on the 5th), O.H.L. gave the general order for the retirement into the Antwerp–Meuse Position.[1] The commanders of the Groups of Armies, including Boehn, had earlier urged on O.H.L. the necessity for a long retirement, but General Field-Marshal von Hindenburg had replied on the 28th giving three reasons for postponing the movement: first, to give up more ground would adversely affect the armistice negotiations; second, would have serious repercussions both at home and abroad; and thirdly, would involve the loss of milliards of marks' worth of property and irreplaceable military equipment[2].

[1] Schwarte, p. 589.

[2] Kuhl ii, p. 419, where Hindenburg's telegram is given. He remarks that, in the end, the property and equipment were lost.

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CHAPTER XXXI

The Pursuit after the Battle of the Sambre

5th–7th November

The Fourth, Third and First Armies

(Frontispiece ; Sketches 30, 36, 37, 39)

On the evening of the 4th November when orders for the next day were issued, it was known that the enemy had been driven from his defences behind the Sambre and Oise Canal and pushed back without much difficulty in the Forest of Mormal ; but the extent of his defeat was not realized. Instructions, therefore, were given by the Fourth, Third and First Armies merely for the continuation of the advance, and for the next few days the great main road Avesnes–Maubeuge–Mons remained the objective. The night of the 4th/5th was exceptionally dark, a circumstance which aided the Germans in slipping away, leaving the usual rear guards of field guns, machine guns and cyclist snipers to delay advance. Heavy drizzle was falling, and for the next few days rain continued incessantly ; the surface of the roads and tracks became churned into slush and mud by the continuous traffic, and movement off the roads was as difficult as it is in Dorset or Somerset ; so the troubles, not only of the troops but also of the transport services already highly tried, were much increased. The enemy, too, was systematically destroying bridges and sections of roads, and placing obstacles and mines. A new device added to the labours of the tunnelling companies detailed to search for and remove charges : it was a delayed-action fuze exactly similar in appearance to the ordinary 5·9-inch howitzer fuze except for a small mark ; so that a howitzer shell provided an easy means of planting a delayed demolition charge, and the detection of a shell fuzed in this way, even in a small dump, was a matter of almost microscopic observation. Owing to these conditions, progress was much slower than the circumstances demanded, and the opportunity to turn an unprepared retreat into a rout could not be taken advantage of. In spite of the bad weather during the night of the 4th/5th, the R.A.F. dropped

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566 bombs on enemy troops and transport, and many German guns were found by the side of the road with dead horses around them, caught either by bomb or shell.

THE FOURTH ARMY[1]

To save the time which reliefs would have required, the brigades of the IX and XIII Corps in the line[2] were ordered forward, at 5.30 a.m. and 6.30 a.m. respectively, with other arms attached and preceded by cavalry. In the IX Corps a squadron each of the Royal Scots Greys and 20th Hussars, and in the XIII Corps troops of the 12th Lancers and Northumberland Hussars, went forward, the latter regiment being directed to operate south of the Sambre as soon as circumstances permitted.

Ahead of the Fourth Army lay hilly country, the outlying features of the Fagnes, themselves outliers of the Ardennes, divided slantwise by the tributaries of the Sambre: the Rivierette, la Petite Helpe, la Grande Helpe, and the de Tarsy.

In the IX Corps, the foremost infantry reached a line about a mile ahead, Zobeau–eastern edge of Toaillon Wood and, north of this, the Army objective of the 4th November, without encountering resistance, but picking up four field and three 4-inch guns. The 137th and 139th Brigades (46th Division) then passed through and relieved the 138th and the 14th Brigade (32nd Division); and the 97th (32nd Division) relieved the 96th. In the course of the day the 2nd Brigade on the right was squeezed out, so that the 46th Division then held the place of the 1st Division in the line. Le Sart was captured by the cavalry, and Favril (with two 8-inch guns) by the 5/Border Regiment (97th Brigade). Although the country was enclosed, no serious opposition was met with until, towards dusk, when as the cavalry had earlier discovered, the line Barzy–Prisches–la Basse Maroilles was found to be held by numerous machine guns, and it

[1] See Sketch 30.

[2] A relief of the 1st Brigade (1st Division) by the 138th Brigade (46th Division) had been completed before midnight.

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was decided not to attack in the dark over intricate, unreconnoitred country.

The XIII Corps went a little farther. The 74th Brigade of the 25th Division, the head of the advanced-guard formation, preceded by a troop of the 12th Lancers, with the 75th Brigade guarding its right flank and keeping touch with the 32nd Division, after turning Germans out of de Catillon Farm, reached the Petite Helpe. This stream is twenty feet wide and in most places below Grand Fayt unfordable; but the 11/Sherwood Foresters found a spot where it could be waded and then mopped up Maroilles, preventing the enemy from blowing up one of the bridges. This was a valuable piece of work, as it enabled armoured cars, lorries and 6-inch howitzers to cross without delay; but the bridge was too narrow for tanks. Fire prevented progress of the 74th Brigade beyond Maroilles. The reserve brigade, the 7th, starting at 7 a.m., marching by muddy country lanes made worse by rain which continued intermittently all day, crossed the Petite Helpe by a pontoon bridge at Old Mill des Près soon after 2 p.m. On approaching Maroilles the 21/Manchester, which was leading, was sent northwards, the rest of the brigade being halted behind the 74th Brigade, to capture Basse Noyelles, to continue the line and to establish touch with the 50th Division. All these duties it quickly fulfilled, finding men of the 50th Division already engaged with the enemy at Basse Noyelles. The line of the 25th Division then extended from Maroilles to Basse Noyelles.

The 50th Division had directed the 151st Brigade to resume the advance, supported by the 260th and 251st Brigades R.F.A., with the Sambre as its right boundary; the 149th and 150th Brigades, with the two artillery brigades, were to move up to the right front and be prepared to cross the Sambre at Hachette Farm, and during the early morning the divisional engineers set about forming a pontoon bridge there. By 8.30 a.m., after some resistance on the railway but none in the forest, the three battalions of the 151st Brigade were aligned along the northern bank of the Sambre, with posts on the southern bank near Hachette Lock, where three foot-bridges had been found, although the bridge on the Maroilles–Locquignol road had been demolished. Meantime, at 8 a.m., Major-General Jackson had held a

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conference with his three brigade commanders, being aware that the 25th Division was pushing forward but without filling the gap which existed along the Sambre between the two divisions. He therefore ordered the 150th Brigade to cross the Sambre at Hachette Farm by the pontoon bridge at 12.15 p.m., followed by the 149th at 2 p.m., each with an artillery brigade, and make for the high ground near St. Roche Chapelle beyond the Grande Helpe. The bridge had not been quite completed owing to lack of sufficient service material, but by the use of planks the infantry were able to cross in single file. Marching through the 25th Division area, as the ground for half a mile along the Sambre between the Petite and Grande Helpes proved swampy, the 7/Wiltshire, which was leading, entered Basse Noyelles, soon afterwards reached by the 25th Division, driving out enemy snipers and machine guns, and arrived at the line of the little stream which enters the village from the north. Thence to the Sambre marshes the ground was empty of Germans. Ahead, however, lay the Grande Helpe, said to be 12 feet wide and 3½ feet deep, and endeavours were made, the last at 10 p.m., to seize the bridge at Haute Noyelles. These failed in the face of fire and natural obstacles, but a patrol took possession of a bridge lower down on the road to a lock, which was passable by infantry but not by wheeled traffic. The front of the 50th Division now being masked by the 25th, the 151st Brigade, lining the northern bank of the Sambre, was assembled in reserve; the 149th Brigade, in view of the slow advance of the 150th, remained at Hachette Farm.

The 55th Brigade, with attached troops, including a troop of the Northumberland Hussars and a company of cyclists, covering the 18th Division front, encountered no resistance in the forest, but on approaching Sassegnies it was received by machine-gun fire. By midday, however, the village and the line of the railway had been secured and the brigade was in touch with the 50th Division and 33rd Division (Third Army) on either flank. From the southern bank of the Sambre enemy fire continued lively, and some field guns near St. Roche Chapelle gave trouble until silenced by the combined fire of Lewis guns and 4·5-inch howitzers. As all the bridges over the Sambre in this sector were down and the hedges on the far bank full of snipers, no attempt was made to secure a passage of the river in daylight but in

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every other sector the troops of the Fourth Army were across the Sambre.

The Third Army[1]

The Third Army (General Hon. Sir J. Byng) and the First Army (General Sir H. Horne) made good progress on the 5th, despite the prohibition against the use of H.E. shell on the villages, and delays caused by the dreadful condition of the roads and worse condition of the tracks, to improve which, as the number of engineers and pioneers was inadequate, the divisions in support, supposed to be resting, provided working parties. The enemy used every suitable position to check the advanced guards, and slipped off as soon as the troops deployed and artillery had been, with difficulty, brought up. The objective of the Third Army was now the great high road from Avesnes, Pont sur Sambre–Bavai–Montignies sur Roc (for short, the "Bavai road"), which passes along the eastern side of the Forest of Mormal. Except on the extreme right near Sassegnies–Berlaimont, where the enemy held the right (southern) bank of the Sambre, resistance was slight. Harassing fire had been kept up during the night and until 7 a.m. on railway and road junctions, but the advance was made without a barrage, one brigade, in a few cases two brigades, of each division, with other arms attached, leading in advanced-guard formation. In order that the bringing forward of the heavy artillery on the bad roads should not delay progress, and to ease supply, General Byng issued instructions that the heavy guns sent forward should not exceed one brigade per division, should be only 60-pdrs. and 6-inch howitzers, and, as far as the situation allowed, the divisions in support should be echeloned in depth.

In the V Corps, the 33rd and 21st Divisions passed through the 38th and 17th east of Locquignol between 6.30 and 7 a.m., and by 10 a.m. their leading troops, the 100th and 62nd Brigades, had reached the western outskirts of Berlaimont, but heavy fire from the far bank of the Sambre

[1] See Sketch 36.

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prevented patrols from crossing the river. Whilst preparations were made by the 222nd and 126th Field Companies R.E. to bridge the Sambre during the night, the 98th and 110th Brigades were brought up, and a line formed not along the river bank but northward from Berlaimont towards the Forest of Mormal, as the ground near the river in that quarter was waterlogged. At 10.30 p.m. parties of the 1/Middlesex (98th Brigade), followed by the 2/Argyll, began crossing by a cork float footbridge a mile south of Berlaimont, and when these battalions had completed the passage about 5 a.m. (6th) the 100th Brigade followed, covered by a light barrage. Half an hour later two companies of the 1/Lincolnshire (110th Brigade) crossed at Berlaimont on planks at a damaged lock and bridge and were followed at 9.40 a.m. (6th) by the 6/Leicestershire and 1/Wiltshire, these latter having been delayed by machine-gun fire, and the organization of a bridgehead was taken in hand.

In the IV Corps the 15th and 95th Brigades of the 5th Division at 5.30 a.m. (5th) had passed through the 37th Division; the New Zealand Division remained in the line: the 2nd New Zealand Brigade, however, relieved the 1st, and the 42nd Division was moved up in readiness to take over. No opposition was encountered in the Forest of Mormal until the transverse road from Aymeries to Gommegnies had been crossed, and then it was weak. The bad state of the tracks in the forest and the craters at the numerous road junctions and stars, some of which concealed machine guns, slowed the pace of the infantry and almost stopped the field artillery; but by 7 p.m. the whole of the Forest of Mormal had been cleared, except the narrow eastern tip, and by 10 p.m. a line on its eastern edges occupied, with a left flank turned back towards the VI Corps Patrols were pushed on to the Sambre and preparations made for bridging it.

The 62nd and Guards Divisions of the VI Corps continued the advance, headed by the 185th and 3rd Guards Brigades, which passed through the line at 6 a.m. Except that a northern salient of the Forest of Mormal projected a thousand yards into the corps sector, the country was of the orchard and hedge type, with four small muddy streams aslant it. The enemy had evacuated Gommegnies during the night, and the resistance offered was slight, so by 8 a.m. two

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thousand yards had been gained. Towards noon the enemy made an attempt to stand on a line from about the northern salient of the forest to Bermeries; but the action of the 5/K.O.Y.L.I. (185th Brigade) and the 1st and 2/Grenadier Guards with five whippet tanks disposed of his desire for resistance. Another three thousand yards were gained by 3 p.m., but, although the Guards captured Bermeries, no further advance was attempted owing to machine-gun and artillery fire. A shell fell on the 3rd Guards Brigade headquarters and severely wounded Br.-General C. P. Heywood.

The XVII Corps attacked at 5.30 a.m. under a creeping barrage in co-operation with the XXII Corps (First Army), the 24th Division sending forward the 17th Brigade (Br.-General G. Thorpe), with the 106th Brigade R.F.A. and a section of 60-pdrs., and the 19th Division, the 56th and 58th Brigades.[1] Considerable opposition from machine guns was encountered under conditions of enclosed country and bad roads, similar to those of the VI Corps, and by about 10 a.m. only the western edge of la Flamengrie and the south-west corner of Roisin had been reached by the 19th Division, but to the south the 24th Division was farther ahead. The advance was continued under a barrage, and by noon the latter division was approaching St. Waast and the 19th Division was entering la Flamengrie unopposed. At 2 p.m. a combined attack, supported by artillery fire and smoke, was made, and over a thousand yards gained, so that the line ran from Pissotiau (with patrols east of the village) to five hundred yards east of la Flamengrie. By this time it was getting dark, and the men were exhausted, so further advance was postponed until dawn. Patrols sent forward to investigate the passage of the Hogneau stream were unable to cross owing to machine-gun fire. The enemy's artillery was practically inactive during the night except that a part of the northern edge of the Forest of Mormal between the fronts of the IV and VI Corps was plastered with mustard gas, and Jenlain shelled by a high velocity gun.

Six hundred prisoners had been taken during the day by the Third Army.[2]

[1] The artillery support of these brigades is not known, as the artillery diaries of the division for November are missing.

[2] Between 6 a.m. on the 4th and 6 p.m. on the 5th, 128 officers and 5,879 other ranks had passed through the prisoners' cages of the Third Army.

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THE FIRST ARMY[1]

The XXII and Canadian Corps continued their operations to dislodge the enemy from the Aunelle river—Rombies–Vicq position—under a creeping barrage at 5.30 a.m. and torrents of rain. The enemy, however, had slipped off to another position two thousand yards farther east. The 11th and 56th Divisions, using the same brigades (32nd, 33rd, 169th and 168th) as on the previous day, did not at first meet with very serious opposition, and took Roisin, Meaurain, a little beyond it, and Angreau, and crossed the Angreau stream; but the enemy held on to Angre as a bridgehead in the deep wooded ravine of the Grande Honnelle; he evidently meant to defend this line, as an organized attack at 4.15 p.m. on Angre by the 168th Brigade under a shrapnel barrage failed to dislodge him.

The advanced guards of the 4th Canadian Division easily took Rombies and Quarouble, but resistance then stiffened, and Marchipont and Fosse (2,000 yards east of Quarouble) checked the advance. The 8th Canadian Brigade (Br.-General D. C. Draper) of the 3rd Canadian Division, covering the left flank of the 4th Canadian Division, took the greater part of Vicq.

By the afternoon of the 5th it was evident from reports that the enemy was in retreat all along the line, so orders were given for the continuation of the pursuit on the 6th.

THE FOURTH ARMY[2]

General Rawlinson directed the advance of the IX and XIII Corps to the La Capelle–Avesnes–Maubeuge road, on reaching which the infantry was to halt, the cavalry continuing on to keep touch with the German rear guards; all tanks and armoured cars were to return to reserve at Landrecies—the order does not seem to have reached the cars, but those employed were either ditched or stopped by road craters.

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[1] See Sketch 37.

[2] See Sketch 30.

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Instructions were also given for the relief of the inner divisions of the two corps by the 1st and 4th Australian Divisions from reserve; but events moved so quickly that this change was not carried out.

Both corps gave a north-south line through Cartignies–Dompierre, about five miles ahead, for the first objective, and this was the line reached. The cavalry patrols went forward at dawn, followed by the infantry at 7.30 a.m., except by that of the 32nd Division, which was delayed until 9.30 a.m. Little resistance was encountered until the line of the Chevreuil and the Petite Helpe down to Grand Fayt, and the road from Grand Fayt to Taisnières on the Grande Helpe were approached; as the enemy was erroneously reported to be holding a position a mile beyond Prisches, a creeping barrage was fired for the 139th Brigade, upon which the few Germans in evidence fled. Patrols of the Royal Scots Greys remained in observation on the corps objective, unable to go very much farther until the infantry of the 137th and 139th Brigades of the 46th Division came up at times varying from 2.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. The inhabitants, overjoyed at their deliverance from the Germans turned out to help fill craters on the roads, as these delayed marching and stopped the armoured cars which were with the 46th Division.

In the 32nd Division sector the squadron of the 20th Hussars and two armoured cars (which came into action near Avesnes and returned safely), crossed the Petite Helpe by the undestroyed bridge in Maroilles. It was at first thought that the infantry must follow the same route, but the 10/Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (97th Brigade) found a boat, and the 5/Border Regiment and 2/K.O.Y.L.I., under machine-gun fire, crossed by throwing carts into the lock at Grand Fayt. Consolidation on the corps objective was completed by 7.30 p.m.

The 25th Division sent forward two brigades, the 74th and 7th, with the 150th and 110th Brigades R.F.A., a detachment of the 12th Lancers, two armoured cars and other troops attached, the advanced guard found by a single brigade on the previous day having proved insufficient to cover the divisional front in intricate country. Opposition was offered at the cross roads west of Marbaix and in Taisnières, but a little shelling soon disposed of it, and thirty prisoners were taken. A German who had just blown up

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the girder bridge in the latter village, was shot as he tried to get away; it still afforded, however, although not for cars, a fair passage for the infantry and pack animals, until a few hours later, when the stream rose two or three feet owing to the heavy rain, and by that time the 105th Field Company R.E. had formed a pontoon bridge. In the farms beyond Taisnières many enemy infantrymen, anti-tank gunners and trench-mortar men, with their weapons, were captured, and later, after a slight resistance, fifty more were taken in Dompierre. It was by now dark, so the appointed line just beyond Marbaix and Dompierre on spurs commanding the valley of the Grande Helpe was occupied.

The 50th Division started operations early to try and secure the bridge over the Grande Helpe at Haute Noyelles. At 2 a.m. four platoons of the 7/Wiltshire (150th Brigade) moved south from its bridgehead below the village, encountering and putting out of action many machine guns defending the river line. As they were approaching Haute Noyelles shortly after 7 a.m. a company of the 2/R. Munster Fusiliers (150th Brigade) made a frontal attack. The bridge was blown up as the two parties drew near, but under covering fire of Lewis guns from either flank against the houses commanding the river the Munster company crossed quickly by the débris, followed by the rest of the battalion. They mopped up the village and pushed on to the high ground at St. Roche Chapelle, picking up sixty prisoners and many machine guns, and then on to the Taisnières–Leval road, where, about midday, the 2/Northumberland Fusiliers, marching by the Wiltshire bridgehead, joined them.

Meanwhile the 149th Brigade, preceded at 4 a.m. by a strong company of the 13/Black Watch as advanced left flank guard, marching by the towpath on the north bank of the Sambre, had, at 7.15 a.m., crossed the river at Hachette Farm and at 11 a.m. the Grande Helpe by the extemporized bridge at Haute Noyelles, and had come up on the left of the 150th Brigade. A meeting of the battalion commanders was held and, although the men were wet and cold, and rations in some cases had failed to appear, it was decided to advance another 3½ miles to the corps objective, a company being sent at once to establish touch with the Third Army. The advance was continued in line of battalions by the 2/Northumberland Fusiliers, the 2/R. Munster Fusiliers with the 7/Wiltshire in reserve), the 13/Black Watch and the

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3/Royal Fusiliers. Considerable opposition was encountered from machine guns along the Dompierre–Leval railway, rather more on the right than on the left, and the country was intricate, so the battalions did not reach the objective beyond the railway until various times after 4 p.m. The Northumberland Fusiliers indeed were at 8 p.m. still two hundred yards from it, and it was 3 a.m. (7th) before this line was reached and consolidated; the Munster were even later, as after passing the railway line they were checked by outbursts of machine-gun fire. All the divisions of the Fourth Army had, however, reached the desired Cartignies–Dompierre line.

The Third Army[1]

On the 6th November the advances made by the corps of the Third Army were small owing partly to heavy rain and bad roads (which, amongst other things, prevented sufficient bridging material being brought up), to the enclosed nature of the country, to the extreme right being confronted by the river Sambre, and to the extreme left by the Hogneau stream, but still more by the determined resistance by small rear guards of the enemy, and the incessant shelling of the river passages. The German *Seventeenth Army* had evidently been told to hold on to gain time for the Armies farther north to escape. Owing to bad visibility and other unfavourable weather conditions, information as to what was happening on the front was very slow in coming back, so that it was difficult to control the fight. The nominal objective, the Bavai road, was, however, reached or passed by the V and IV Corps and the right of the VI Corps, and the rest of the Army were not far from it.

The 33rd and 21st Divisions (Major-Generals R. J. Pinney and D. G. M. Campbell) remained in the front line of the V Corps. During the night of the 5th/6th and early morning they, as already noticed, had formed a bridgehead across the Sambre. By 8.25 a.m. two battalions of the 98th Brigade (Br.-General J. D. Heriot-Maitland), one and a half of the 100th (Br.-General A. W. F. Baird), and two companies of the 62nd Brigade (Br.-General G. H. Gater), all of which were soon relieved by two battalions of the 110th, were over

[1] See Sketch 36.

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the river. A transport bridge was then put in hand and the footbridges doubled, but on account of heavy fire on the bridgeheads, no artillery crossed the Sambre. The infantry spent the day clearing the villages between the right Army boundary, the Bavai road and the Sambre. A large factory south-east of Berlaimont and the railway triangle were mopped up between 7 and 8 a.m.; the capture of Leval, which was full of machine guns, followed before 9 a.m., after which the 19th Brigade passed through and relieved the 98th and 100th. Aulnoye was occupied by 12.45 p.m., Aulnoye station and le Bouvier, about 1.40 p.m., and Aymeries soon after 4 p.m.; and by 6 p.m. the 19th and 110th Brigades (Br.-Generals C. R. G. Mayne and H. R. Cumming) had reached the Bavai road.

In the IV Corps the 5th Division (Major-General J. Ponsonby) continued in the line, but during the night of the 5th/6th November the New Zealand Division was relieved by the 42nd (Major-General Solly-Flood), a difficult business on a dark, wet night in a forest. The attack was resumed by both divisions at 6.30 a.m., the 5th Division employing the 95th and 15th Brigades (Br.-Generals C. B. Norton and R. D. F. Oldman), and the 42nd Division, the 126th Brigade (Br.-General T. H. S. Marchant). Except on the left, where heavy machine-gun fire from Hargnies, Vieux Mesnil and other localities held up the left of the 126th Brigade, an advance was made over the Bavai road to the Pont sur Sambre–Hargnies road which runs about four hundred yards from the Sambre, companies of the 1/Cornwall L.I. entering Pont sur Sambre, capturing 16 prisoners and making good the western part of the village. Except in the Pont sur Sambre loop, the west bank of the river seemed clear of the enemy, but the steep slope east of the Hargnies road was untenable owing to machine-gun and artillery fire from the eastern bank, so the troops remained where they were, lying on the ground in the wet for the rest of the day, whilst, all the bridges being reported down, reconnaissances were made to select bridging sites. At 3.15 p.m. the bridge north of Pont sur Sambre was found by the O.C. 59th Field Company R.E. to be intact, but it was later blown up.[1]

[1] Major R. M. Cloutman, R.E., who received the V.C., seeing that the bridge was prepared for demolition, crept over the tow-path, swam across the river and cut the leads, whilst the bridge was swept by enemy machine-gun fire. Before a platoon of infantry could arrive to prevent repairs, the enemy had mended the leads and blown up the bridge.

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Attempts were made under a light barrage to throw bridges during daylight at the lock at the southern end of Pont sur Sambre, and a thousand yards north of the northern bridge, but had to be abandoned until dark.

In the VI Corps, the 62nd and Guards Divisions remained in the line, and they sent forward as on the previous day the 185th Brigade (which the 186th relieved about noon) and the 3rd Guards Brigade. The country ahead was very enclosed, a network of small fields and intersected by five small streams, which afforded good lines of defence by machine guns. Every building, too, was made use of, one gun firing from Mecquignies church tower, and 30 being found in Obies church, but the piles of empty cartridges left behind indicated that the defenders probably fired off all the ammunition and then decamped, and that the gunners, manning a number of single guns, behaved in the same way. The strongholds had to be dealt with one by one by encirclement, under machine-gun and light trench-mortar barrages, so advance was slow. Obies and Bavisaux were, however, soon cleared, and by noon Mecquignies and its château had been taken, and the general line ran north and south just east of the village, with the left bent back facing Bavai (in the XVII Corps area). This nearly represented the final position of the Guards, who could not advance much farther whilst the XVII Corps was hanging back, but the 186th Brigade went on in the afternoon, driving back a counter-attack made against its right about 3.30 p.m., as far as the Pont sur Sambre–Bavai road, and there established touch with the IV Corps.

In the XVII Corps the 17th Brigade of the 24th Division and the 56th and 58th Brigades of the 19th Division, as on the previous day, led the advance, moving on the roads with advanced guards, movement over the sodden heavy soil of the cultivated fields in this area being very slow and tiresome. On the left, the 58th Brigade captured Bettrechies under a light barrage without much difficulty, but on the right the efforts to enter St. Waast without artillery support proved futile, the Germans withholding their fire until the 17th Brigade was within three hundred yards. It soon became evident that the enemy was making a temporary stand from Pissotiau to St. Waast northward along the

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railway beyond the Hogneau stream, which here runs in a narrow wooded valley. Attempts to turn St. Waast from the south and north failed, and the few men who managed to cross the stream, though the attack was now supported by field artillery and trench mortars, were driven back. For the moment nothing could be done except to keep the enemy's fire down and harass the roads in his rear. The obvious course was to turn the enemy position from the south near Pissotiau, east of which place touch of the Guards Division, which was well ahead, was obtained. A conjoint attack of the 24th and 19th Divisions was arranged for 3.30 p.m., the reserve battalion of the 17th Brigade and other reinforcements attacking the position in flank. But at that hour the troops were not in position and, the men being exhausted by two days' fighting and bivouacking in the wet, it was decided to postpone attack until next day. The progress of the Third Army had been less on the 6th November than on the two preceding days.

THE FIRST ARMY[1]

The enemy, established on the deeply cut and wooded reach of the Grande Honnelle, between Gussignies and Angre, continued with machine guns and trench mortars to offer strong resistance to the XXII Corps all day; his artillery too was very active. Except a bridgehead at Angre, very little was gained. The Canadian Corps advanced about four thousand yards, crossing at the close both the Aunelle and the Grande Honnelle. The VIII Corps remained on the Schelde, and was subject to a certain amount of artillery fire.

In the 11th Division (Major-General H. R. Davies) the 32nd and 33rd Brigades (Br.-Generals W. P. S. Foord and F. G. Spring) again led, advancing at 5.30 a.m. under a light barrage, gun ammunition being short owing to the transport difficulties. The advanced troops made their way over the crest west of the Grande Honnelle, but could not stay on

[1] See Sketch 37.

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the forward slope owing to lack of cover, and at 4.30 p.m. it was decided to postpone further attempts to advance until next day. On the left, towards dawn, the 56th Division (Major-General Sir C. P. A. Hull) front line had been shelled with gas and high explosive, and gas masks had at first to be worn ; but, against strenuous resistance, the 2/London of the 169th Brigade (Br.-General E. S. D'E. Coke) managed to cross the river south of Angre and gain a footing on the eastern bank, taking about twenty prisoners. The 14/London of the 168th Brigade (Lieut.-Colonel A. F. Marchment acting) captured Angre and also established itself on the eastern bank. The 13/London (of the same brigade) also crossed north of Angre, taking 80 prisoners, but was driven back by a counter-attack. Advancing again, the battalion established itself on the high ground east of the river, only to be forced back a second time. A counter-attack at 10 a.m. also drove the 2/London over the river, but the London Scottish held on to Angre. Local fighting continued all day, but the line remained unchanged, the bridgehead at Angre being maintained.

The Germans opposite the Canadian Corps showed the same disposition to hold their ground behind the Grande Honnelle, but tried also to hold the foreground and the line of the Aunelle. The 11th and 12th Brigades of the 4th Canadian Division, with the 8th Brigade of the 3rd Canadian Division, on the left, under a barrage, in the first bound, turned the enemy out of Marchipont on the Aunelle, and also of the great area of factories called Quievrechain, where the 8th Canadian Brigade took 200 prisoners. Continuing on, the 102nd Battalion (11th Canadian Brigade) captured Baisieux on the far side of the Grande Honnelle ; and the 12th Canadian Brigade then also crossed both streams and established posts in Quievrain. Later, the 8th Canadian Brigade captured Crespin, but the bridges there were found to be blown up. Thus a good bridgehead had been gained on the Grande Honnelle from Baisieux to Crespin and patrols went on to the great Bavai–Hensies main road. The reserve battalion of the 8th Canadian Brigade crossed the Schelde south of Fresnes about 5.30 p.m., but no attempt was made to advance owing to the country eastward to the Honnelle being flooded, a sufficiently good flank protection for the Canadian Corps.

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THE FOURTH ARMY[1]

The morning of the 7th November was shrouded in a thick mist, which lasted all day, and it was dark by 4 p.m. Inhabitants gave the information that the Germans had moved off at 3 a.m. Where they had halted had to be discovered.

The Fourth Army had given the Avesnes–St. Aubin road, marked by a line of knolls and spurs, as the general objective. The IX Corps started at 7 a.m. and the XIII at 8 a.m., sending the squadrons of the Royal Scots Greys, 20th Hussars, and 12th Lancers and the cyclists ahead to get touch of the enemy. As the country was close with many enclosures and high hedges, this was no easy matter. The 138th Brigade, leading the advance of the 46th Division, and the cavalry with it, were able to wade through the Chevreuil, but the Petite Helpe was in flood, 36 feet wide and 10 feet deep. The infantry got over by throwing in trees and carts, and placing ladders and planks on them, and the 466th Field Company R.E. formed a pontoon bridge in Cartignies by which the cavalry and, later, field artillery crossed; and during the day the 468th Field Company constructed two more bridges.[2] In the 46th Division sector the enemy was found holding high ground east and north-east of Hautlieu, and in the 32nd Division sector, in which the 97th Brigade led, Avesnes was defended by many well-placed machine guns. As the state of the roads and bridges prevented the guns of the 46th Division from coming up, it was found impossible to dislodge him. So dense was the mist about midday that a platoon of the 5/Leicestershire (138th Brigade), on bursting through a hedge, found itself in the midst of a German field battery, the officers and men of which were standing idly about, with the horses tethered close up. The rest of the company came up, but the Leicestershire were driven back, managing, nevertheless, to take with them 29 prisoners, 8 horses and a breech block. Even at Avesnes where the 161st Brigade R.F.A. and the whole machine-gun battalion of the 32nd Division gave assistance, an assault made by the 2/K.O.Y.L.I., achieved very little progress, and both sides lay down at night within a short distance of one another.

[1] See Sketch 39.

[2] The difficulty for vehicles was a drop of 10 or 11 feet from the banks to the water level, and it required good driving to dash down the bank and scramble up the other side.

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At Cartignies the 60-pdr. guns required to batter Avesnes could not cross the pontoon bridge, and, as there were miles of vehicles waiting to cross, it was decided at 8 p.m. to build a 75-foot bridge on trestles, and this was done by the 466th Field Company R.E. in the dark by the light of two shaded lanterns, with the water running like a mill race, so that 20 men had to be put on each launching rope. The bridge was tested by taking over the 60-pdrs. at a trot, and the heavy artillery and transport of the 46th and 32nd Divisions, and part of the French XV Corps then crossed.

Similarly the 75th and 7th Brigades of the 25th Division and the 151st of the 50th Division, two 18-pdrs. accompanying each battalion, were checked at the high ground half a mile north-east of St. Hilaire, and at St. Aubin and at Dourlers ; the advance of the Third Army on the left affording useful help, they eventually succeeded in turning the enemy out of the two latter, both in the valley of the de Tarsy. The long slopes south of this stream offering no good position, the right of the 50th Division fell back, holding the line by platoon posts. The objective road of the Fourth Army had not been reached on the 7th except on the extreme left.

The Third Army[1]

On the 7th November, without further orders, the corps of the Third Army continued their advance towards Maubeuge The shelling of the Sambre valley had entirely ceased.

In the V Corps the advanced guards of the 33rd and 21st Divisions at 5.45 a.m. again pushed forward, the 19th and 110th Brigades leading as at the close of the previous day ; but at 5.30 a.m. the 64th Brigade (Br.-General C. V. Edwards) crossed the Sambre at Aulnoye, with orders to pass through the 110th at an intermediate objective, and at 1.20 p.m. the 98th Brigade passed through the right of the 19th Brigade. At first there was no resistance ; some of the batteries having got over the Sambre, their barrages were sufficient to clear the villages, and it was not until the 19th and 64th Brigades reached the woods east of Pot du Vin–Limont

[1] See Sketch 36.

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Fontaine and the high ground north of the latter that the advanced troops came under rifle and machine-gun fire, and those of the 64th Brigade under artillery fire. The 19th Brigade, however, reinforced by the 98th, drove off the rear guards and pushed through the woods to the Dourlers–Eclaibes road. The advanced guard of the 64th Brigade entered Limont Fontaine as early as 10.30 a.m., but was unable to clear it, and at 12.30 p.m. divisional orders were given for an organized attack at 5.45 p.m. against Eclaibes and Limont Fontaine. This resulted in the centre of Eclaibes and the high ground north of Limont Fontaine being reached, which enabled the latter village to be pinched out, after which Eclaibes was cleared. Only 130 prisoners were taken, mostly in Limont Fontaine. At 9 p.m. the 38th and 17th Divisions relieved the 33rd and 21st.

Lieut.-General Harper's orders to the IV Corps, which was wholly on the west bank of the Sambre, were for the 5th Division to push on in close touch with the left division of the V Corps and secure bridges east and south of Pont sur Sambre, and for the 42nd Division to time its advance on the left in accordance with the progress of the VI Corps, but to ensure that its right kept abreast of the 5th Division and attacked the high ground north-west of Boussières. These orders had the unfortunate effect that the 42nd Division waited for the VI Corps, and did not advance until 8.45 a.m., and whilst the 42nd Division thus hung back, the 5th Division pressed on.

There being a noticeable diminution of the enemy's fire on the whole front, at 6 a.m. the 1/Cheshire, leading the 15th Brigade (5th Division), crossed the Sambre by a pontoon bridge, thrown near the bridge north of Pont sur Sambre. Preceded by cavalry patrols, the brigade made good the railway east of Bois Georges, with a left flank thrown back, as the 42nd Division was not up. As the Germans remained in possession of the Boussières peninsula all day, the 15th Brigade suffered considerably from enfilade fire. At 8.45 a.m. when the 126th Brigade of the 42nd Division at last went forward, supported by the 210th Brigade R.F.A.,[1] it reached Hargnies and Vieux Mesnil, which had given such trouble on the previous day, without difficulty, the former having been

[1] Neither the diary of the G.O.C. 42nd Division artillery, nor those of his brigades, have any entry on 7th November.

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abandoned, whilst a solitary machine gun fired from the latter. By 11 a.m. the advance was progressing favourably on the whole front, and Lieut.-General Harper issued a more ambitious order. It was for the 42nd Division to gain the high ground west of Hautmont and, if possible, capture the town, whilst the 5th Division was to co-operate by encircling Hautmont from the south, and cut the enemy's line of retreat. Again the 5th Division pressed on and the 42nd Division hung back. At 12.30 p.m. its 95th Brigade, passed through the 15th Brigade, which it had followed, making for Fontaine and the southern edge of Hautmont. It encountered considerable opposition, and though it captured Fontaine and established touch with the V Corps in Limont Fontaine, as no artillery crossed the Sambre until 3.45 p.m., it was unable to get forward on the left owing to fire from Boussières across the river, and from the commanding position of the village of St. Remy mal bâti.

The left flank of the 42nd Division had also suffered from enfilade fire from the left and the 126th Brigade did no more than occupy the high ground east and south-east of Vieux Mesnil; so in the evening the 125th Brigade (Br.-General H. Fargus) was ordered to pass through it next morning and advance to the objective. At 5 a.m. (8th), however, the 126th, in the endeavour to atone for its slowness on the 7th, pushed on, and by 5.30 a.m. its patrols were entering the Bois d'Hautmont and found Boussières evacuated, and, as will be seen, it reached Hautmont before the 125th Brigade caught it up.

In the VI Corps, which had arranged to co-operate with the XVII Corps, the 62nd and Guards Divisions still led, but fresh brigades, the 186th and 2nd Guards, passed through the leaders to carry on the advance. During the early part of the night (6th/7th), there was a considerable amount of enemy shelling, also machine-gun fire from localities close in front. When this ceased, sounds indicating withdrawal were heard. Patrols of the Guards which entered Bavai at 4.30 a.m. learnt from the inhabitants that the Germans had left two hours earlier. Preceded by patrols, the whole line of the VI Corps went forward at 6 a.m., except the left battalion of the Guards, which waited to keep connection with the XVII Corps. Lieut.-General Haldane subsequently issued instructions that troops were not to hold back from

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fear of possible danger from the flanks. No opposition was encountered by the 186th Brigade until about 10 a.m., when, after struggling along muddy cratered tracks, it arrived at the Hargnies–la Longueville road, some four miles ahead. As the latter village was approached the 2nd Guards Brigade, which had the support of the LXXIV and LXXXV Brigades R.F.A., came under machine-gun fire from the orchards round it. The 186th Brigade went forward again at noon, and, with the assistance of the 310th Brigade R.F.A., an advance of a thousand yards to the line Vieux Mesnil—eastern edge of Bois Delhaye was made. At 4 p.m. it advanced again ; but resistance had stiffened and, having orders not to press the advance in such a case, the brigade was halted. At 4 p.m. the 1/Scots Guards, which had gained possession of the high ground south of la Longueville, was ordered to take the village, and pushed right through it, but was unable to clear it completely before dark, so a line for the night was occupied west of the village. Prisoners taken in the village stated that the Germans were retiring that night on Maubeuge.

The experience of the 24th and 19th Divisions of the XVII Corps was the same as that of the formations of the VI Corps ; during the early part of the night the enemy demonstrated by shelling the forward area and villages behind it, actually pushing two patrols across the Hogneau—and then slipped off. At 6 a.m. the 17th Brigade of the 24th Division and 57th and 58th of the 19th went forward under a barrage, but encountered no opposition until the Bavai–Bellignies main road was crossed, and Bavai had been taken over from the Guards. The 72nd Brigade (Br.-General R. W. Morgan) then passed through the 17th and as the front narrowed the 58th fell out of the line and took over left flank protection, as the First Army was not yet abreast. Resistance, as usual, gradually increased, the artillery support was not very ample, and as machine-gun and trench-mortar fire failed to dislodge the enemy, the advance came to an end about 6 p.m. Patrols on the high ground south-west of Taisnières were called in, after they had discovered that enemy parties were still west of the (Taisnières) Hogneau ; but the patrols in front of the Bois Verdeau on the left remained out. Connection was established with the corps on the right and left.

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THE FIRST ARMY[1]

During the night of the 6th/7th November, after a certain amount of machine-gun activity, the enemy made a general withdrawal—according to the inhabitants, about 11 p.m.—on the front of the First Army south of the Condé canal, that is opposite the XXII and Canadian Corps; but he continued to hold the line of the Schelde opposite the VIII Corps, with a certain number of troops in the water-logged triangle between the Honnelle, the Schelde and the Condé canal, including the village of Thivencelle; but, as a number of fires and explosions were observed, it was clear that he was preparing to go from there also. Before dawn on the 7th some reliefs of the front-line troops were carried out; the 167th Brigade (56th Division) and the 189th (63rd Division) took the places of the 169th and 168th Brigades of the 56th Division, so that the XXII then had three divisions in the line, the 11th (with the 32nd and 33rd Brigades at the front), 56th and 63rd; but before handing over, on discovering the withdrawal of the Germans, the 168th Brigade pushed across the Grande Honnelle and secured the high ground east of it. The 2nd Canadian Division replaced the 4th on the right of the Canadian Corps.

The advance during the morning was rapid and the troops of the XXII Corps, starting at 9 a.m., under a barrage,[2] crossed the Grande Honnelle on the whole front, the troops of the 11th Division entering Gussignies and Autreppe, the 56th capturing Onnezies, and the 63rd getting as far as the Bavai road and securing Audregnies. Only 54 prisoners were taken. The 5th Brigade of the 2nd Canadian Division, though the bridge at Baisieux was not yet passable, sent forward patrols at 5.45 a.m., and a detachment of Brutinel's Mobile Force[3] was brought up to lead the pursuit if opportunity occurred. Ground was gained right up to Elouges, but short of Thulin, and the 8th Brigade of the 3rd Canadian Division, still acting as left flank guard, captured Hensies and La Croix. Towards noon opposition from machine guns stiffened, particularly from the woods opposite the XXII Corps, and from the almost continuous collections of houses

[1] See Sketch 37.

[2] Fired by 5 field artillery brigades and 2 60-pdr. batteries per division.

[3] See p. 20.

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opposite the Canadians; but the whole of the right of the XXII Corps crossed the Bavai road, and the left went well beyond it, capturing Montigny, as well as Audregnies, the 63rd Division (Major-General C. A. Blacklock), mopping up the Bois d'Audregnies, whilst the 8th Canadian Brigade cleared Elouges.

During the period 5th–7th November, dealt with in this chapter, the tactics of the enemy in retreat had changed to the extent that bridges had been more systematically destroyed and roads cratered, that the infantry, disorganized and demoralized, had nearly disappeared and the rear guards were formed almost entirely of artillery and machine-gun marksmen battalions, whose action was directed towards covering the retreat of the infantry and the removal of stores. Without the aid of aeroplanes, and the weather was unfavourable for their employment, even concentrations of artillery were difficult to locate, and scattered guns and machine guns could only be detected by drawing their fire. It was an occasion for the use of mobile troops, as the Germans did not stand when their flanks were turned; unfortunately very few tanks were available, and no boldness was shown in employing motorized troops and cavalry. The gain of ground each day was consequently small.

The difficulties of supply have already been mentioned. They were accentuated by the task of feeding the French population liberated by the advance. It had been agreed between French and British Headquarters that the British army should feed them for four days, after which time the French engaged to take over the supply and distribution of food; in effect, no French supply trains arrived before the 16th November, and no French lorries before the 28th November. On the 15th November the First Army was feeding 317,882 civilians using 1,026 motor lorries and 666 G.S. wagons. Further, to provide food, the battalions regularly gave up 25 to 30 per cent. of their rations, some units went on half rations, and at their own expense bought everything they could, especially tinned milk for the children, from the divisional canteens.

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At 12.30 a.m. on the 7th Maréchal Foch received a wireless message from O.H.L. giving the names of the plenipotentiaries for the arrangement of an armistice, asking for the designation of the place of meeting, and requesting a suspension of hostilities as soon as the German delegates had reached the Allied lines. The Generalissimo replied that the German envoys should present themselves at the outposts of the French First Army by the road Chimay–Fourmies–la Capelle–Guise, and they would be conducted to the place fixed for the meeting. At 8.15 p.m. the delegates arrived in motor cars at the outposts; they were driven to a representative of General Debeney at la Capelle and taken by train from Tergnier to Réthondes in the Forest of Compiègne.

NOTE I

The French and Americans on 5th–6th November

On the 5th, in the words of F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 239, "the enemy "began a vast movement of retreat extending from the Meuse to "Condé on the Schelde", that is on the front of the American First Army westwards to the front of the British First Army.

The Americans continued to make good progress and the French Armies of the Centre joined in the pursuit of the enemy, except the left wing of the Fourth Army, which had since the 31st October been held up on the river Aisne and its canal. The French First Army entered Guise and continued abreast of the British Fourth Army. On the 6th all these Armies continued the pursuit; "but as the French Fourth, Fifth and Third and First Armies "advanced their zones of action tended to become smaller.[1] "Actually, at the beginning of the pursuit on the morning of the "5th November, they occupied a frontage of 130 kilometres "[81 miles]; on their arrival at the Meuse they were to hold no "more than 75 kilometres [42 miles]. On the other hand, the "American frontage did not cease to increase . . . . On the "6th November, therefore, General Pétain, in consideration of "transport difficulties, with which the number of lorries available "could not cope, informed the commanders of the G.A.C. and "G.A.R., Generals Maistre and Fayolle, that they should each "reduce their forces from two Armies to one Army of four corps "and twelve divisions". (F.O.A. (ii), p. 240–1.)

[1] See End-paper A.

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On the 6th, too, Maréchal Foch decided to launch the Lorraine offensive as soon as possible, and proposed to add some formations of the American Second Army to the forces he had ordered General Pétain to assemble.

F.O.A. does not mention any fighting on the 7th, merely giving the line reached by the American and French Armies " after " three days of uninterrupted efforts ". At 7.15 p.m., by telegram General Pétain instructed that the " mission of the G.A.R. is to " support the British right wing, making its principal effort by " the Chimay gap [20 miles E.N.E. of la Capelle and leading " towards Givet on the Meuse] ". The G.A.C., as its principal task, was to secure Mezières, Charleville and Sedan, and establish a bridgehead on the Meuse.

By the evening of the 5th the American First Army was over the Meuse (except in one small sector) down to Dun, thence to beyond Stenay lined along it, and the left, the V and I Corps, was little more than ten miles from Sedan.

The French First Army henceforward kept abreast of the British right wing.

NOTE II

THE GERMAN SITUATION IN EARLY NOVEMBER

Towards the end of October evidence of the state of feeling in the Army, the Navy and the Homeland had become too obvious to ignore or conceal.[1]

On the 30th October the *18th Landwehr Division* had refused to go into the trenches in Lorraine, and there were signs of disaffection in other divisions (Gallwitz, p. 446) ; on the 2nd November the reinforcements from the Eastern Front for the *Seventeenth Army* mutinied and had to be disarmed by a Storm battalion, and its Chief of the Staff stated that it would not stand another attack (Rupprecht, p. 366). In the back areas wandered thousands of deserters and marauders. (Kuhl, *Weltkrieg* ii, p. 459).

On the 29th and 31st October orders were issued at Kiel by the Admiral Staff for a sortie of the fleet to save honour, and " the crews of several big ships refused to obey the order and put " to sea "—they wanted peace ; on the 3rd November " alarming " news about the Navy reached the Chancellor ". The troops of the IX Corps District, sent against the mutineers, fraternized with them, and on the 5th Kiel was in the hands of the sailors, red

[1] A good account of the last days will be found in Max ii.

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flags were flying everywhere and it was calculated that there were 40,000 mutineers. The revolutionary movement quickly spread to the other ports and inland.[1] On the 4th, the *2nd Guard Division*, a first-class assault division, was ordered to Cologne to maintain order.

The abdication of the Kaiser had become the great question of the moment. It had been raised at a Cabinet meeting on the 31st October, when the Prussian Minister of the Interior said, "It cannot be denied that the movement for His Majesty's "abdication is gaining daily strength among a large section of the "people—not only among the workers, but also in the middle "classes. The Kaiser and the Crown Prince are regarded as "standing in the way of peace". The Kaiser, who was at O.H.L. in Spa, refused to return to Berlin.

On the 3rd November Austria accepted the armistice terms offered, so troops were sent to guard the Bavarian frontier.

General Gröner, Ludendorff's successor, had arrived at Spa from the Russian front only on the 30th; there he spent two days to get his bearings. He found that, in fact, there "were no "reserves left", and that the fortress guns, even from Metz and Strassburg, had been taken into the field. He then set about visiting the higher staffs; but he was summoned to Berlin on the 5th. His view, as a soldier, was "if a stop is not put to the agita- "tion against the Kaiser, the Army's fate is sealed, it will simply "break up".

On the 5th General Gröner informed the Cabinet: "We can "hold out long enough for negotiations. If we are lucky the "time might be longer; if we are unlucky, shorter .... But "one thing must not be allowed to happen: the American Army "—or any considerable portion of it—must be prevented from "advancing north of Verdun".

On Wednesday, the 6th, General Gröner depicted the situation "in even blacker colours than on the preceding day". He told the Chancellor that an armistice as between "Army and Army" must be obtained and, in reply to a question, said: "No: "even Monday will be too late; it must be Saturday at latest .... "I have come to the conclusion that, painful as it is, we must "take the step of asking Foch for terms and meanwhile retreat "behind the Rhine". General Schwarte (p. 609) heads the section of his book beginning on the 7th November, "Collapse "of the German Army".

On the evening of the 6th President Wilson's Note of the 5th November was received by wireless, notifying that the [illegible]nment of the U.S.A. and the Allied Governments had

[1] is shown graphically by a map in Max ii.

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authorized Maréchal Foch to receive representatives of the German Government and communicate to them the terms of an armistice.

Before General Gröner left Berlin for Spa on the afternoon of the 6th, he had settled with the Chancellor on the composition of the Armistice Commission. At his suggestion, Erzberger was appointed Government representative,[1] General von Gündell as O.H.L. member, with Count Oberndorff of the Foreign Ministry, Captain Vanselow of the Navy and Major-General von Winterfeldt, who had been military attaché in Paris and spoke French perfectly. These were the names submitted to Maréchal Foch; but at the last moment O.H.L. withdrew General von Gündell, so that the pretence could be maintained that the armistice had been demanded by the Civil Government, not the Army. But from the German archives published during the "Second "Reich" no doubt whatever exists that first and last it was the Supreme Command which insisted on the demand for an armistice, Ludendorff first voicing it on the 27th September and Gröner finally on the 6th November.

[1] Erzberger was Minister without portfolio; he was head of the Catholic Party and the strongest coalition in the *Reichstag*. He was assassinated on 26th August 1921.

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CHAPTER XXXII

The Advance to the Armistice Line

The Fourth, Third and First Armies

8th–10th November

(Frontispiece ; Sketches, 20, 36, 37, 39)

On the 7th November, G.H.Q. had issued orders that on the 8th :

> The Fourth, Third and First Armies should continue their present operations with the object of reaching the line Avesnes–Maubeuge–Mons road (for short, the "Avesnes road") : advanced guards and mounted troops should then be pushed forward beyond the road to keep touch with the enemy : every endeavour should be made to restore the rearward communications ;
>
> The Fifth and Second Armies,[1] in conjunction with the Flanders Group of Armies should on the 11th November carry out an operation to force a passage of the Schelde and then drive back the enemy over the river Dendre (15 miles east of the Schelde) :
>
> The Cavalry Corps (less 2nd Cavalry Division and one cavalry brigade) would operate under the orders of the G.O.C. Fifth Army.[2]

The deciding factor of the pace at which the pursuit of the enemy could now be carried on by the Fourth, Third and First Armies was supply.[3] Although the railways had by now been reconstructed from Busigny to Wassigny, from Cambrai nearly to Solesmes, and had reached Valenciennes, explosions of time mines made it necessary to use railheads farther back, and from these supplies and ammunition had to be brought forward by motor transport. The ever-lengthening distances involved and the gradual deterioration

[1] The Second Army had been restored to Sir Douglas Haig's command on 4th November, the Schelde having been reached.

[2] The brigades of the 2nd Cavalry Division were distributed : the 3rd to the First Army, the 4th to the Third Army and the 5th to the Fourth Army. The "one cavalry brigade" (the 7th was selected) went, as will be seen, to the Second Army.

[3] See Sketch 20.

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of the roads as the weather grew worse, the demolitions more frequent and the traffic heavier, imposed a severe strain on the transport vehicles and their drivers. The mobile workshops found it almost impossible to deal with the abnormal amount of repairs due to bad roads and to excessive use. The infantry had by now got beyond the forward limit of lorries, reckoned at about thirty miles, and beyond that limit the divisional horse transport bringing up supplies, although reinforced from the ammunition columns, was beginning to feel the extra strain involved in the hilly country which the Armies were now entering.

The weather, too, continued bad, with rain at intervals, and the nights were very dark, but, in spite of being wet through and caked with mud, the spirit of the troops remained excellent, cheered by the news that enemy envoys had arrived and that armistice negotiations were in progress. In spite of broken bridges, the field artillery managed to give assistance, but the heavy artillery, owing to the state of the roads, could not push forward. Water presented no difficulties: there were plenty of streams for the horses, and the Germans had retired in such haste that they had left intact the watering arrangements, often with electric pumps, in the villages.

THE FOURTH ARMY[1]

At 7.50 p.m. on the 7th General Rawlinson gave as instructions for the 8th that the main bodies of divisions should remain west of the Avesnes road: that a detachment of all arms should be sent forward to secure and hold the high ground (actually large knolls giving good observation) ahead, the IX Corps that west of Sains du Nord and beyond the railway line near le Vert Buisson Farm, and the XIII Corps that west of la Villette Wood, in the northern part of that wood and in Beugnies Wood.

In the IX Corps the 46th Division again sent forward the 138th Brigade, and the 32nd Division the 97th Brigade to secure the Avesnes road and then push forward outposts to the objectives named by the Army. Most of the field and medium artillery had managed to come up, and there was

[1] See Sketch 39.

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promise of good support, as, although at 7.30 a.m., when the advance began, a fairly thick mist prevailed, this quickly thinned. The cavalry and cyclists preceding the infantry found the enemy still in his positions of overnight.[1] To aid the 138th Brigade, at 8.30 a.m. the 231st Brigade R.F.A. put down concentrations of fire for a time on the main points of resistance along the Avesnes road and, reinforced by the 298th Brigade R.F.A., did so again at 11.30 a.m., whilst the LXXXII Brigade R.G.A. shelled the high ground beyond. Between noon and 1.30 p.m. the Germans began to withdraw, owing to the 66th Division on the left of the 46th outflanking them, and the 138th Brigade reached the Avesnes road and subsequently continued on nearly to the line named in Army orders.

The 97th Brigade made slow but continuous progress, the 2/K.O.Y.L.I. and 10/Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders dribbling forward in small numbers, and about midday, under a barrage fired by the 161st Brigade R.F.A., they rushed the German posts, entered Avesnes and continued a further mile and a quarter until darkness intervened. The two armoured cars with them were unable to go through Avesnes owing to road craters; the one car with the 46th Division was ditched and shelled.

In the XIII Corps the 199th and 198th Brigades (Br.-Generals G. C. Williams and A. J. Hunter) of the 66th Division (Major-General H. K. Bethell) which had relieved the 25th, supported by the 112th, 150th and 331st Brigades R.F.A. and a section of 60-pdrs., opposed by the *Jäger Division*, which used its machine guns well, also fought their way forward steadily. One company of the 18/King's and one of the 5/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers of the 199th Brigade reaching the Avesnes road as early as 11 a.m., and by 1 p.m. the road was completely in the hands of the 66th Division. At 2 p.m. an advance was to be made by fresh battalions, the 6/Lancashire Fusiliers and 5/Connaught Rangers, but it was not until 2.30 p.m. and 4 p.m., respectively, that this took place and as the *Jäger Division*, aided by a sunken road, still fought well, though nearly two miles was gained, the objective high ground was not reached.

[1] Prisoners stated that they had been ordered to hold on until the 9th in order that stores and wounded might be got away.

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The 50th Division again sent forward the 151st Brigade, with all three battalions, the 1/K.O.Y.L.I., 6/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers and 4/K.R.R.C., in line, supported by the 110th and 112th Brigades R.F.A. (25th Division). In spite of machine-gun fire they advanced rapidly, and reached the Avesnes road by 9.30 a.m., a company of the Inniskilling mopping up the village of Mont Dourlers. They then came under fire from guns in the western edge of Beugnies Wood, which continued all the morning. About 10 a.m. a prisoner volunteered the statement that a regiment, about five hundred strong, was in Beugnies Wood and had orders to regain the Avesnes road at all costs. This information proved to be true, and at 11 a.m. enemy infantry and machine-gun detachments began to debouch against the K.O.Y.L.I. and Inniskilling from the cover of the hedges east and south-east of Semeries, supported by artillery and overhead machine-gun fire. The infantry was easily dispersed, but the machine gunners pressed forward with great determination, and the counter-attack was not finally beaten off until between 12.30 and 1 p.m.

According to plan, the 149th Brigade was to take the final objective, and it passed through the 151st Brigade, the 2/R. Dublin Fusiliers leading at 2.30 p.m. with the 3/Royal Fusiliers, in support. Enemy shelling, machine-gun fire, coupled with oncoming darkness prevented much progress. The Dublin Fusiliers had by 4 p.m. taken Flourses; but it was 2 a.m. (9th) before the Royal Fusiliers gained possession of Semeries and the Germans retired. Prisoners had already divulged that a retirement on a large scale would take place on the 9th, and the sound of exploding charges seemed to confirm this; so during the night the brigade pushed on and reached the western edge of Beugnies Wood, which patrols then cleared. The total advance was little short of the line of observation desired by the Fourth Army.

THE THIRD ARMY[1]

The Avesnes–Maubeuge road remained the objective of the Third Army. "On reaching the road", said the Army orders, "the high ground east thereof will be occupied. "Touch with the enemy to be maintained by advanced

[1] See Sketch 36.

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" guards and mounted troops. Main bodies not to be " pushed beyond the general line of the Avesnes road ". A later communication to the corps commanders informed them that " the Army commander desires that the operations " for attaining the objective allotted to the Army should be " confined for the moment, and until the decision of the " Germans [as regards the armistice terms] is known, to " pushing forward patrols and following up the retreating " enemy as far as the limits ordered, or manoeuvring him " out of position. He does not wish any set attacks to be " undertaken other than those which have been already " ordered and prepared ". Considerable progress was, however, made on the 8th November, and the extreme right reached the objective, but the left halted about 4½ miles west of it.

The advanced guards of the 38th and 17th Divisions of the V Corps, the 113th and 51st Brigades, though supported by the divisional artillery, were unable to make much progress before dark, the enemy holding the eastern bank of the Ruisseau de la Braquenière, the stream which runs through Eclaibes, and the Avesnes–Maubeuge road from la Belle Hôtesse Farm to le Violon in some strength ; it was subsequently learnt from prisoners that they had orders to hold on all day at all costs. In the early morning there was considerable enemy machine-gun and heavy artillery fire, and about 4.30 a.m. the left of the 51st Brigade was forced to fall back a little from its place of assembly. At midday a company of the 13/R. Welch Fusiliers (113th Brigade) captured la Belle Hôtesse Farm, and later, under a barrage, some progress was made in the Bois le Roy by the 16/R. Welch Fusiliers, but it was not until darkness fell that the 113th Brigade succeeded in crossing the Ruisseau de la Braquenière and establishing itself east of the Maubeuge road from Floursies to la Belle Hôtesse Farm. At 2 p.m. and at 4.45 p.m., under a barrage, the 51st Brigade made attempts to reach the road, but it was not until after 9 p.m. that patrols, finding the enemy gone, went east of it and entered Beaufort ; but they were unable to gain touch of the enemy.

The IV Corps kept the 5th and 42nd Divisions in the line, the 95th and 126th Brigades, with other arms attached,

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leading. Lieut.-General Harper ordered the continuation of the operation of the previous day to capture Hautmont and cut off the Germans in it by encirclement on the south.

The 95th Brigade, on this flank, supported by the 13th Brigade, was to push eastwards, capturing St. Remy mal bâti and le Payé (on the Maubeuge road), whilst the 126th Brigade, supported by the 125th Brigade moved directly on Hautmont. The 95th, starting at 6.30 a.m., took St. Remy mal bâti without opposition, but was checked a thousand yards beyond, near the Fontaine–Hautmont road. The 13th Brigade, which was at la Porquerie on the eastern edge of the Forest of Mormal, did not start until 10.15 a.m., was delayed by the congestion on the temporary bridges at Pont sur Sambre, and did not catch up the 95th Brigade until 7 p.m. when, in the darkness, it pushed on towards the Maubeuge road, which by 1 a.m. it had very nearly reached.

The 126th Brigade seized the Bois d'Hautmont before daybreak, and sent patrols into the part of the town which lies north of the Sambre, where only small rear guards were found. All the bridges were down, but the leading battalion, the 10/Manchester, improvised means of passage, cleared the town and engaged the rear guards holding a line on the heights east of it near Fort d'Hautmont, one of the ring of outer forts of Maubeuge. Meantime, the 125th Brigade had appeared on the right of the 126th. Unable to cross the Sambre at Boussières as the pontoons had not arrived (they did not do so until 11 a.m.), the brigade which had been billeted north of Pont sur Sambre had partly to retrace its steps, and it crossed at that place about 8 a.m. By noon it had pushed through the Bois du Quesnoy, lying immediately south-west of Hautmont, thus filling the gap between the 5th Division and the 126th Brigade. The enemy rear guards were then gradually forced back, and when darkness fell patrols went forward and cleared them off the high ground near the Fort d'Hautmont.

In the VI Corps Lieut.-General Haldane kept the 62nd and Guards Divisions in the line, and they sent forward the 187th and 2nd Guards Brigades, at 6.30 a.m. and 6 a.m. respectively. Progress was at first rapid. By 8 a.m. the two leading battalions of the 187th Brigade had captured Neuf Mesnil and the road north of it; but three-quarters of an hour

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later the front line and Neuf Mesnil were heavily shelled, and it was evident to Br.-General A. J. Reddie that the enemy was in position at Fort Gravaux, and in a village and on slag heaps to the north-east, and could be dislodged only by an organized attack. He decided to turn the position from the south with his reserve battalion, the 5/K.O.Y.L.I. The attack was made at 2.30 p.m. under a barrage, and by 4.15 p.m. the railway and road north-east of Hautmont, the houses on which were all defended, had been secured. In the early part of the night two determined efforts to capture Fort Gravaux were made without success, but in a third at 4.30 a.m. (9th) the fort, with a few prisoners only, was taken.

The 1/Coldstream of the 2nd Guards Brigade had no difficulty in driving the remaining Germans out of la Longueville ; but then its advance and that of the 1/Scots Guards on its right, met with stubborn resistance, with enfilade fire from Fort Gravaux on the right and from Feignies on the left, the XVII Corps being some distance in rear of the Guards ; but after dark good progress was made all along the line, and the southern environs of Feignies were reached, the right remaining in touch with the 62nd Division.

On the front of the XVII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. Fergusson) the enemy retired during the night and when at 6 a.m. the 72nd and 57th Brigades, the advanced guards of the 24th and 19th Divisions, went forward without a barrage, the passage of the Hogneau was not defended except by a few scattered machine guns which retired rapidly from position to position. As the 1/North Staffordshire, which led the advance of the 72nd Brigade, emerged from the long southern arm of the Bois de la Lanière, it was received by fire from Feignies and the Maubeuge–Mons railway, and in a very enclosed country, a labyrinth of small fields, hedged and wired, intersected by a number of small streams, could make little progress. Although the 8/West Kent came up on its left, the patrols of neither battalion, even after dark, could penetrate into Feignies.

The 57th Brigade soon reported Taisnières clear, and by 8 a.m. was east of Malplaquet (where a party of Germans held out in the cemetery until nightfall).[1] Leaving the 58th Brigade, as the First Army was not up, to form a

[1] Marlborough's Malplaquet. The Bois de Lanière was part of the position.

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defensive left flank along the Erelle stream, the Army boundary, the 57th pushed into the Bois de la Lanière. Considerable opposition was encountered from machine guns, but the brigade was hindered more by the denseness of the undergrowth than by fire, yet made a total advance of over four miles. At night, therefore, the line of the Third Army was a mile or more from the Maubeuge–Mons railway, where the enemy seemed to be in position. Great difficulty was experienced in bringing up ammunition for the field artillery, but it was overcome by allotting ten lorries to each of the divisions in the line.

THE FIRST ARMY[1]

While the German *Second Army* opposite the Third Army had tried to stand fast on the 8th November, the *Seventeenth Army*, opposite the First Army, and, as will be seen the *Sixth Army* opposite the Fifth Army to the north, fell back during the night of the 7th/8th or in the early morning of the 8th. The First Army was about to enter the Mons district over which the original B.E.F. had fought in 1914: it was a blind and close country, traversed by the Mons–Condé canal, and well suited for a delaying action. The ground on both sides of the canal itself is cut up by a network of drainage watercourses, chequered by osier beds, for a breadth of nearly a mile in the south and considerably more in the north. North of this watery barrier is a succession of large woods; immediately south of it is a huge coal mining area. From the line Elouges–Boussu eastwards the country looks to be one huge unsightly village of poor houses, traversed by a vast number of haphazard cobbled roads and broken by pitheads and great slag heaps, often over a hundred feet high. Besides these natural difficulties of ground, nearly every bridge had been blown up and nearly every cross roads cratered; thus advance was bound to be slow, even without much opposition. Resistance, however, was slight until well after midday, and then only from snipers and machine guns. In the XXII Corps the 32nd and 33rd Brigades (11th Division), 167th Brigade (56th Division), and 189th Brigade (63rd Division) encountered little opposition until about 2 p.m., when they had nearly completed

[1] See Sketch 37.

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their day's march—the leading troops being fed by supplies dropped by aeroplane. Then, as they approached the long belt of woods which extends north-westwards from west of Blaregnies nearly to Dour they were received with artillery and machine-gun fire, and as numerous streams added an obstacle to the almost impassable state of the muddy tracks, it was decided to halt.

In the Canadian Corps in the early morning the 7th Brigade (3rd Canadian Division) entered Thulin, and the 5th Brigade (2nd Canadian Division), on its right, gained about a thousand yards. The general advance at 8 a.m. was not checked until 1 p.m., after the 5th Brigade had reached the eastern side of the huge village of Dour, and the 7th Brigade had gone somewhat farther. Little other progress was made, except that the 8th Brigade, by means of a footbridge and boats, established two parties north of the Mons canal to guard the flank, but, after dark, patrols south of the canal pushed forward about a thousand yards, and in the fighting which ensued inflicted considerable losses on the Germans.

On the VIII Corps front, on the Schelde, explosions had been heard and the enemy had exhibited a good deal of activity during the night with machine guns and trench mortars, so, as expected, patrols which crossed the canal in the early morning found the enemy gone. The code word for pursuit was sent out at 8.30 a.m. and two companies each of the 156th and 157th Brigades of the 52nd Division crossed at once by means of rafts and footbridges ready to support the mounted troops (a squadron of the 4th Hussars and 2 platoons of cyclists) and bridging was at once taken in hand, so that the main bodies began to cross about 1 p.m. The material difficulties to be overcome were considerable; not only the Schelde canal and subsidiary channels, but also the Jard canal and inundations, the best road being 3 feet under water for two hundred yards. There was, however, no opposition, except from a few snipers, and satisfactory progress was made. Condé was occupied and thence a line a little west of north, with advanced troops at Lorette. Thus the right of the VIII Corps was only about four miles behind the Canadians, and half that distance from the nearest Canadian post north of the Mons canal. So little

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contact with the enemy had the Third and First Armies on the 8th that in all only 98 prisoners were taken, 48 by the one and 50 by the other.

9TH NOVEMBER

THE FOURTH ARMY

Infantry patrols which went out during the night of the 8th/9th November on the whole Army front reported that touch with the enemy rear guards could not be obtained. The weather on the 9th was fine and the R.A.F. during the day confirmed the German retirement and was able to harass the enemy with small bombs and machine-gun fire. An organized raid was made on Beaumont, a German railhead.[1] At dawn, when the cavalry squadrons went forward into hilly, wooded country a few German stragglers were picked up, but no opposition was offered, and they were able to ride nine or ten miles right to the Belgian frontier before contact with the enemy was gained in Touvent Wood, at Clairfayts and Hestrud (these villages were soon cleared), and along the far bank of the river Thure (where the enemy was in position). At Solre le Château a large amount of rolling stock, including a loaded ammunition train and several hundred wagons and limbers, and a large ammunition dump were found, and elsewhere many guns and much apparatus had been left behind.

The Avesnes–Maubeuge road having already been secured, the infantry were required to do no more than reach the observation line selected: Sains du Nord–le Vert Buisson Farm–la Taquennerie–la Villette Wood–Beugnies Wood; but, with the exception of the 32nd Division, all the divisional outposts were pushed a little farther than this. When at 2.10 a.m. Br.-General Robinson (149th Brigade) reported that all was quiet and that he was convinced, as his patrols had found no Germans in Beugnies Wood, that they were in retreat, a mobile column of the 150th Brigade with four days' supplies was organized by the 50th Division. At first the XIII Corps forbade the use of this column, but at 9.20 a.m. consented. By 12.30 p.m. the 7/Wiltshire, the head of the column, was in Solre le Château, 4 miles from the start, with the remainder of the 150th Brigade behind it in

[1] Sketch 39, north-east corner.

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Lez Fontaine and Sars Poteries, and there they all halted. At night cavalry outposts were established along the railway line Liessies–Lez Fontaine, with Liessies and Solre le Château held.

During the morning of the 9th, General Rawlinson, in order to ease supply, issued orders for a mobile force to be formed to carry on the pursuit, whilst the rest of the Army halted: the main bodies of the divisions were to remain on or west of the Avesnes–Maubeuge road, distributed in depth with outposts on the line already defined: the mobile force to keep touch with the enemy on the whole Army front was to be formed next day under the command of Major-General H. K. Bethell of the 66th Division, a cavalryman and the youngest divisional commander. This force was to consist of the 5th Cavalry Brigade (to which the squadron already operating with the French First Army belonged), No. 17 Armoured Car Battalion (7 cars were collected), an infantry brigade, a field gun battery, two sections of 4·5-inch howitzers and two of A.A. guns, the divisional engineers (430th, 431st and 432nd Field Companies), the pioneer battalion (9/Gloucestershire) and the machine-gun battalion of the 66th Division. The South African Brigade, under Br.-General W. E. C. Tanner, was selected as the infantry, and, after an arduous march from Dompierre by field tracks, reached Beugnies, where the 66th Division contingent was assembled, by 7 p.m. (9th).[1] Lieut.-Colonel A. C. Little, acting commander of the 5th Cavalry Brigade (less the 12th Lancers, 1½ squadrons 20th Hussars, and the composite squadron of the Royal Scots Greys, already on the spot) reported at 2 a.m. (10th), that it was on its way to Catillon, and on arrival would have marched 36 miles; it was therefore arranged that it should not continue on to Avesnes, 15 miles farther, until the afternoon of the 10th, but be ready to move forward early on the 11th.

The Third Army[2]

The telegraphic orders of the Third Army for the continuation at 5 a.m. on the 9th November of the advance to the

[1] The following troops, additional to Fourth Army orders, also joined the force: the 66th Division Signal Coy., the IX and XIII Corps cyclist battalions and a second field battery of the 331st Brigade.

[2] See Sketch 36.

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Avesnes–Maubeuge road were issued at 5.20 p.m. on the 8th. In the Guards Division they were at 6.15 p.m. passed on to the 2nd Guards Brigade. Soon afterwards an order captured on a German runner by the 1/Coldstream Guards was brought in. It was to the effect that the next enemy line of resistance was to be west of Rouveroy (7 miles north-east of Maubeuge) and that the rear guards were to hold on at all costs until the morning of the 9th. When Major-General Matheson suggested a thrust on Maubeuge (3 miles from the front line) that night, he found that Br.-General Sergison-Brooke had already detailed the 3/Grenadier Guards, his reserve, with machine guns on pack mules, to move on Maubeuge by the la Longueville–Maubeuge road at 10 p.m. The night was pitch dark, but, except for a few stray shots, no opposition was encountered, and by 2 a.m. (9th) the Grenadiers were in possession of the citadel of the old fortress and about fifty prisoners. The rest of the Germans were already away; so by 3 a.m. the town was clear, and the inhabitants began to come forth from the cellars in which they had taken refuge.

The enemy was in fact in full retreat before dawn, and the advance of the infantry of the Third Army was preceded by the mounted troops (a cavalry squadron[1] and two platoons of cyclists per division), who did not obtain touch with the enemy until the afternoon. By noon the leading brigades had reached the Avesnes–Maubeuge road on the whole Army front and were pushing on to a line of observation beyond, overlooking the valley of the Solre. In all, only 131 prisoners were taken by the Third Army on this day.

The Army aircraft during the day dropped half a ton of bombs on ground targets and fired on the congested traffic on the roads leading east, and up to 10 p.m., when fog interfered, 1½ tons of bombs had been dropped on railway junctions and stations and transport near them.

In the V Corps, in which the 113th and 52nd Brigades of the 38th and 17th Divisions led, it was reported that at midnight (8th/9th), patrols had been unable to get touch of the Germans, and in the advance none were seen except four stragglers picked up in Beaufort; the mounted troops

[1] The 6th Dragoon Guards provided 2 squadrons for the XVII Corps; the 3rd Hussars, 2 for the IV Corps; the Oxfordshire Hussars, 2 for the V Corps; and the Northumberland Hussars, 2 for the VI Corps. The hree first named regiments belonged to the 4th Cavalry Brigade.

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reported all villages clear up to the Thure (10 miles east of the Avesnes–Maubeuge road), and that the enemy had an outpost line west of that stream.

The 13th and 125th Brigades of the 5th and 42nd Divisions of the IV Corps encountered no resistance in reaching the observation line; then mounted troops captured 3 train loads of machine guns and munitions at Ferrière le Grand.

In the VI Corps, after the 2nd Guards Brigade had captured Maubeuge, the 187th Brigade of the 62nd Division cleared St. Lazare, the suburb of the town south of the Sambre, and both 62nd and Guards Divisions then went on to the observation line.

In the XVII Corps the 19th Division, on the left, was directed to clear the Bois de la Lanière, and the 24th Division, with the 72nd and 73rd Brigades, to take over the corps front. Some little opposition was encountered on the Maubeuge–Mons railway, but it was crossed by 8 a.m. By 11 a.m. the 19th Division had passed through the Bois de la Lanière and established touch with the 11th Division (First Army) east of the wood; it then handed over its front to the 24th Division and was withdrawn into reserve.

Beyond the line of observation, the mounted troops of the Third Army, supported by infantry patrols, remained out at night in the villages on and beyond the Solre, from Dimachaux, by Ferrière le Petit and Cerfontaine, Assevent, Elesmes (which was slightly shelled during the day) to Bersillies. Some of the villages were shelled, Rousies with gas, during the night. The mounted troops could not live on the country, as practically nothing had been left for the inhabitants and some difficulty was experienced in supplying them; otherwise they could have been pushed farther forward.

As in the Fourth Army, orders were issued in the afternoon, to take effect at 11 a.m. next day, for the task of keeping touch with the enemy to be taken over by an Army advanced guard, to which the 4th Cavalry Brigade was assigned, under Lieut.-General Haldane of the VI Corps; its direction was given as north-east towards Thuin–Binche (Thuin is 15 miles E.N.E. of Maubeuge, also on the Sambre, and Binche 7

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miles north-east of Thuin). The other three corps were to be responsible for the protection of the Avesnes–Maubeuge road; but they were to thin out their fronts as far as necessary and echelon troops back in order to facilitate supply.

THE FIRST ARMY[1]

Some sharp patrol fighting took place during the night east of the salient of the Canadian front north-east of Dour, in which 20 Germans were killed and 9 taken prisoner. After this skirmish the enemy disappeared, and the advance of the XXII and Canadian Corps was continued without opposition, the same divisions and brigades leading as on the previous day, to the Avesnes–Maubeuge road from south-east of Quévy to the outskirts of Mons. From there, with a flank along the Condé canal, the Canadian line swung back to Ville Pommeroeul north of the canal (inclusive); for, the VIII Corps not being up, the 8th Brigade of the 3rd Canadian Division had sent a battalion into its area to seize the town, and found it unoccupied. Only fifty prisoners were gathered in during the day. The conglomeration of mining villages through which the Canadians had to pass was undefended, and in the great line of woods from Blaregnies to Dour no sign of the enemy was seen. At night the front line of the XXII Corps was just east of the Avesnes–Maubeuge road, the Canadian line just short of it. A little machine-gun fire was received from Havay in front of the extreme right; Mons appeared quiet, only a sentry on a bridge denoted that the enemy was still in occupation; earlier an enemy line of rifle pits had been reported as running from Ghlin south-eastwards towards Mons.

In spite of the difficulties caused by inundations, and although the refilling points from which supplies had to be brought by horse transport were still west of the Schelde, the 52nd Division of the VIII Corps reached the Pommeroeul–Antoing canal. There all the bridges were found to be down, but the infantry managed to cross by the lock gates and, relieving the Canadians in Ville Pommeroeul, took position for the night north and south of the Bois de Ville, with a left defensive flank on the northern side of the Dendre

[1] See Sketch 37.

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canal, as the Fifth Army front line was about five miles to the rear. The three regiments of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade (Br.-General J. A. Bell-Smyth) were allotted to the three corps of the First Army, but did not arrive in time to take part in the day's operations.

As a result the Fourth, Third and First Armies had, except on the extreme left, reached their objective the Avesnes–Maubeuge road, and established themselves in observation beyond it.

At 2.30 p.m. on the 9th Maréchal Foch telegraphed to Sir Douglas Haig and the other Commanders-in-Chief:

"The enemy, disorganized by our repeated attacks, "is yielding ground on the whole front.

"Our advance should be kept going and hastened.

"I appeal to the energy and the initiative of the "commanders-in-chief to make the results obtained "decisive".

The French and British Armies made no special effort to respond to this appeal, but the American First Army made a famous one, as will be seen.

10th November

On the 10th November, the Fourth, Third and First Armies, having, with the exception of the left wing of the last named Army, reached the Avesnes–Maubeuge road, the objective fixed by G.H.Q., the main bodies of the leading divisions of the Fourth and Third Armies halted, covered by outposts, and sent forward detachments of cavalry and infantry to gain touch with the enemy. The First Army continued the advance in order to come up into line, and in the early hours of the 11th captured Mons.

In the course of the day, the Commander-in-Chief's train was moved forward 18 miles, from Bertincourt (5 miles east of Bapaume) to Iwuy (13 miles west of le Quesnoy).

The Fourth Army[1]

The day was at first foggy and rainy. Twenty tons of bombs had been dropped during the night of the 9th/10th,

[1] See Sketch 39.

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after 18½ tons by day, and the operations included raids on two railway stations. The delay in the arrival of the 5th Cavalry Brigade upset the programme of Bethell's force, which was the formation of a bridgehead across the river Beaumont from Fourbechies (about 3 miles above Renlies) to Renlies. The 12th Lancers and two platoons of cyclists led the advance towards Sivry; they found Moulard held, were shelled in Hestrud, cleared Germans out of Berelles, and advanced towards Cousolre. All the patrols found the enemy on the river Thure, with many machine guns and strong artillery. The one and a half squadrons of the 20th Hussars located a continuous line of machine guns south of Sivry, and later more of them prolonging the line northwards.[1]

Meantime the other arms of Bethell's force had marched from Solre le Château at 7 a.m. with an advanced guard of the 1st South African Infantry, single sections of field artillery, engineers and machine guns. Owing to the damage done to a culvert under the road it was 9.30 a.m. before the head of the advanced guard entered Hestrud, 3 miles away, already, held by the 12th Lancers, who reported that the Germans were in strength half a mile to the east. Under cover of the woods the leading battalion deployed, and at 10.30 a.m. fording the stream which runs through the village, attacked on either side of the main road.[2] It immediately came under fire of artillery and machine guns and of low-flying aeroplanes; but by 3 p.m. the high ground east and north-east of Hestrud had been captured. The advance was not pressed farther, as the instructions to Major-General Bethell were no more than that he should maintain touch of the enemy. On the left a squadron of the 12th Lancers continued the line and obtained touch with the mounted troops of the Third Army, the other squadron being withdrawn to Solre le Château. On the right of Bethell's Force the 199th Brigade (Br.-General G. C. Williams) was arriving at Clairfays. As the 5th Cavalry Brigade would not be available on the 10th, Major-General Bethell had obtained authority to use the 199th Brigade, and it had marched at 12.30 p.m. with orders to fill the gap between the French

[1] The composite squadron of R. Scots Greys was withdrawn from the front to rejoin the 5th Cavalry Brigade

[2] Shortly afterwards the enemy opened sluice gates higher up the stream, and it became unfordable.

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and the South African Brigade, with the help of the one and a half squadrons of the 20th Hussars. At 2.30 p.m. an air report was received at Major-General Bethell's headquarters that a continuous column of German transport was moving along the Eppe Sauvage–Montbliart road. The message that it should be cut off by infiltration through the woods did not reach the advanced guard until 4.35 p.m., and in the failing light progress through the woods was far too slow for success; a squadron of the R.A.F., however, caught the column and did great execution. The enemy's air activity was slight, but 14 of his planes were shot down. No touch could be obtained with the French First Army,[1] and the detachment of the 20th Hussars was at night withdrawn to Clairfays. During the evening the enemy shelled Solre le Château station, and about 6.30 p.m. hit the German ammunition dump and caused an explosion, but an ammunition train, no doubt the target, escaped damage.

The Third Army[2]

A few changes took place in the Third Army during the 10th November: in the IV Corps the 5th Division took over the whole corps front so that the 42nd Division could be withdrawn, and in the XVII Corps the 20th Division relieved the 24th. At 11 a.m. the VI Corps, as advanced guard of the Army, assumed the protection of the whole front, and the 62nd and Guards Divisions moved their main line forward about two miles to cover Ferrière le Grand–Rousies–Assevent and northwards towards Elesmes. At 7 a.m. air reports stated that German positions had been seen in the woods south of Cousolre and thence northwards along the Thure to the Sambre. When the corps cavalry and cyclists went forward they found village after village clear of the enemy, and, except for a little fire whilst a squadron was moving on Aibes, it was not until dusk and they were approaching the Thure that, confirming the air report, signs of the enemy were manifest. Northwards of Solre sur Sambre Germans were still in trenches near Rouveroy. The 4th Cavalry Brigade did not operate as such during the 10th. Its

[1] The situation map in F.O.A. vii (ii), Carte 13, shows the French left at Eppe Sauvage which was still in enemy possession. The text places it at Moustier en Fagne, 2½ miles to the south.

[2] See Sketch 36.

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headquarters and details, which left Caudry (west of le Cateau) at 5 p.m. on the 9th, did not reach la Longueville, after a 35-mile march, until 3 p.m., and its orders, issued at 3.45 p.m., after the assembly of its regiments had been arranged, merely ordered an advance next day.

THE FIRST ARMY[1]

Although the First Army, except on the left, was up to or just beyond the Avesnes–Maubeuge–Mons road, it had still to establish itself in a good position of observation beyond the road; so the advance was continued on the whole front on the 10th November. Here the German *Seventeenth Army*, instead of retiring, endeavoured to hold back the British advanced guards in order to give time for the Armies farther north to escape. Most of the enemy rear guards stood their ground for a time, forcing the British to deploy and attack before they evacuated their positions, and this was particularly the case at Mons and immediately north and south of the town, where they fought stubbornly, the rearmost parties of machine-gunners having orders to fight to a finish.

On the right, in the XXII Corps, the advanced guard of the 11th Division drove the enemy's rear guards through Havay and captured the high ground east and north-east of the village, but was then stopped by machine-gun fire. The heads of the 56th and 63rd Divisions secured Harveng and Nouvelles on the de Nouvelles stream, the latter division gaining the high ground beyond; the former was stopped at the stream by fire, but managed eventually to force a passage after the 16th Lancers had crossed and flanked the Germans off the ridge between the de Nouvelles and Trouillon streams. In this stage of the war, when the German machine-gunners cleared off once their flanks were turned, the absence of mounted troops was severely felt; the cyclists, who might have been useful, could not move rapidly on the muddy and cratered roads.[2]

The 2nd Canadian Division, the right of the Canadian Corps, moved forward in the sector immediately south of

[1] See Sketch 37.

[2] The squadron of New Zealand Mounted Rifles with the 11th Division was reported as only 11 strong.

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Mons. Fighting for every yard of ground among houses, orchards, gardens and streams, against snipers and machine guns supported by some shelling, by 11 a.m. its troops were through Mesvin and entering Nyon. The enemy was then found to be holding the high wooded ground beyond the Rivière de Nouvelles and the Trouillon stream a thousand yards away, and although two brigades of field artillery gave assistance, very little progress could be made; but the low hills, including Mount Erebus, south of Mons, were secured, rendering the tenure of the town precarious, and threatening the enemy's line of retreat. In the 3rd Canadian Division, the 7th Canadian Brigade advanced towards Mons with one battalion north and one south of the Condé canal, and here also the Germans put up a stubborn defence all day on favourable ground, with artillery concealed in the woods to the north and east of Mons. The town is enclosed by canals on its southern, western and north-western sides, which made it difficult to get to close quarters with the machine-gunners; but nevertheless, the Princess Patricia's Canadian L.I. and its relief, the 1/Canadian Mounted Rifles (8th Brigade) gradually worked up to the outer banks of the canals, and the 49th Battalion, north of the Condé canal, passed through Ghlin and reached the Canal du Centre north-west of Mons, where it was relieved by the 7/Highland L.I. (157th Brigade, 52nd Division).

The main German force appears to have begun to leave Mons about 5 p.m., but numerous parties of machine-gunners were left, and throughout the early part of the night fired heavily on all attempts to cross the canal. It was decided by Lieut.-General Currie to clear the town, and the 42nd Battalion (7th Canadian Brigade) with trench mortars, was brought up. About 2.30 a.m. (11th) patrols succeeded in crossing the canal at various points, and at 4.30 a.m. two companies, following the patrols entered the outskirts of the town and quickly disposed of the machine-gun posts, the crews of which were all either killed or captured. By dawn Mons was clear of the enemy, and the advanced guard of the 3rd Canadian Division marched through.

The 52nd Division had made every endeavour to bring the front of the VIII Corps in line with the Canadian Corps, and by marching eight miles on muddy roads practically succeeded in doing so. The 4th Hussars (3rd Cavalry

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Brigade), who led, were checked for a short time by fire from the Bois de Baudour, but there was no real opposition except north of the line of the woods, where the enemy attempted to hold the line Vacresse–Herchies. Infantry was rapidly pushed up to support the cavalry, and the position was turned from the south through the Bois de Baudour. Towards evening the 23rd Brigade (8th Division) came up on the right, having marched fifteen miles.

Rumours that an armistice had been concluded were current on the 10th, and this had been a factor in the desire of the troops to press on and kill as many Germans as possible "before the whistle blew". But no official news having come through—the armistice was not signed until 5 a.m. on the 11th—orders were issued for the continuation of the operations.

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CHAPTER XXXIII

The Retirement of the Germans from the Schelde

The Fifth Army

1st–10th November

(Sketch 40)

During the first seven days of November the enemy (*Sixth Army*) aligned along the Schelde,[1] with a bridgehead covering Antoing and Tournai, retained his position and no serious effort was made to dislodge him. If, on the 11th November, the enemy still remained on the Schelde G.H.Q. intended as already noticed that the Fifth and Second Armies should make a combined operation to force the passage;[2] but all preparations were put in hand, to follow him up if he retired before this date, to establish small bridgeheads if opportunity occurred, and make a rapid advance if an armistice were arranged. Meanwhile, both sides carried out harassing fire and intermittent bombardments daily. British patrols were active and tried to cross the canal on rafts to test the enemy's defences; but he was always found vigilant, and offered stubborn resistance. A good many raids were made by forces up to a company, generally resulting in the capture of prisoners: notably by the 1/7th King's, 1/5th King's Own, and 1/5th South Lancashire of the 55th Division; by the 24/Welch and 10/Shropshire L.I. of the 74th Division, and by the 1/18th London of the 47th Division and 11/Somerset of the 59th. The Germans made several small raids against the British posts, all but one unsuccessful; their general attitude was defensive, as their frequent gas bombardments showed; but no sign of weakening or of intention to withdraw had been noticed, and the prisoners captured denied all knowledge of any orders for a retirement. Bad weather prevented much air reconnaissance, but on the 5th the bridges in Tournai and a number of temporary footbridges were reported intact,

[1] See Sketch 40.

[2] See Chapter XXXII (G.H.Q. orders of 7th). This order transferred the Cavalry Corps (less 2nd Cavalry Division) to Fifth Army.

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and on the 6th, which was wet throughout the day, and on the 7th, when thick mist and rain prevailed, no signs of activity could be seen.

Very early on the 8th patrols of the 16th, 55th and 74th Divisions discovered that the enemy had abandoned his bridgehead west of Antoing–Tournai, and they were able, practically unopposed, to reach the western bank of the Schelde from Bruyelle, opposite Antoing, to Froyennes in the southern part of the 47th Division area, and to cross the river. North of this the Germans maintained their posts on the eastern bank and opposed all attempts at passage.[1]

In the sector of the 58th Division troops of the 174th Brigade (Br.-General A. Maxwell), with the 2/2nd London of the 173rd attached, were over the le Discours stream and beginning to cross the river by means of rafts and floats by 6.30 a.m., all four battalions at different places, the 8th and 2/2nd London leading. A pontoon bridge was formed by the afternoon to connect with the Espain–Sin road; but it was evening before all the battalions were over. The Maire of Laplaigne, about 9 a.m., told the 2/2nd London that the Germans had evacuated his village and Sin about 6.30 a.m. and were likely to fall back behind the Antoing–Pommereuil canal. A prisoner taken later in the day said, however, that the retirement was to a line about 1½ miles west of Leuze (8 miles east of Tournai), where his battalion had been digging trenches and erecting wire. The roads were found to be destroyed in places, and as many as nine mines were removed from the short Espain–Sin road. The advance was slowed up in consequence; but an enemy shelling of the crossing places towards dusk was ineffective, as most of the troops of the 174th Brigade were already over, and the 175th and 173rd Brigades were halted for the night back near Maulde and Bleharies. At the end of the day the 8th and 2/2nd London were holding the line Fort de Flines—east of Roeux—Sart Colin.

In the 15th Division, patrols had reported in the night and early morning that they had been in touch with the enemy in and near Bruyelle; but at 9.15 a.m. information reached divisional headquarters from the 58th Division (Major-General

[1] The German retirement began at 2 a.m. on the 8th, artillery fire being continued until 6 a.m., but machine guns were active until about 11 a.m

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F. W. Ramsay) that its patrols had reached the four villages south-east and east of Sin without opposition, and from the 16th Division, on the left, that its patrols had encountered no resistance. Accordingly the code word for advance in case of a suspected withdrawal was sent out and reached the front line of the 44th Brigade (Br.-General N. A. Thomson) by 10.5 a.m. The ground ahead for some eight hundred to two thousand yards, known as the Hollain marshes, was flat and intersected by ditches and irrigation channels, and in its flooded condition, with two or three feet of water over it, impassable for all arms. Troops could effect a crossing of the Schelde by the railway embankment and bridge north of Hollain, but the only means then of moving south was by the towpath, and the only possible site for a temporary bridge was at the southern end of Antoing. The 8/Seaforth crossed the river at Hollain by rafts and, moving along the towpath, was as early as 11.30 a.m. reported to be at Le Large and the slag heap to the north : actually the battalion was engaged in a serious action at these places. The defenders were shelled from 3.30 to 4 p.m. and arrangements were made with the 58th Division for patrols from Sart Colin to get in rear of them ; but it was not until night that the enemy evacuated his strongholds.

In the 16th Division (Major-General A. B. Ritchie) at 4.30 a.m. a patrol of the 5/R. Irish Fusiliers (48th Brigade, Br.-General R. N. Bray) discovered that the enemy had abandoned his front position ; so reconnoitring patrols, supported by fighting patrols, were sent out which tried to push to the river bank ; machine guns, however, continued to fire from Antoing, particularly from the slag heap, and the British artillery was unable to crush them. By 1.30 p.m. the Irish Fusiliers were still half a mile from Antoing, and for the next three and a half hours were unable to make any progress. The relief of the battalion by the 18/Scottish Rifles and 22/Northumberland Fusiliers of the same brigade was then ordered, and the Scottish Rifles crossed at Bruyelle in the dusk in boats and by two floating bridges constructed by the 155th Field Company R.E. and the 11/Hampshire (Pioneers), at a cost of one man drowned and one wounded. At 2 a.m. (9th) 2½ companies were able to advance without opposition, and by 4 a.m. had taken position along the railway east of Antoing, the Fusiliers following and continuing the line on the left.

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Patrols of the 166th and 165th Brigades (Br.-Generals R. J. Kentish and L. B. Boyd-Moss), and of the 231st Brigade (Br.-General C. E. Heathcote) of the 55th and 74th Divisions found the enemy still in position at 2 a.m.; but an hour later his machine-gun fire died down and it became abnormally quiet. Strong patrols were then able against slight opposition to work their way down to the river, some as early as 7 a.m.; but Calonne on the west side could not be occupied until after dark on account of fire from the other bank. The commander of the 1/6th King's (165th Brigade) entered Tournai, encroaching on the sector of the 74th Division, on the heels of his patrols at 7.45 a.m. and was received with enthusiasm by the burgomaster and the inhabitants. The enemy was still in the portion of the town on the eastern bank, and was sweeping all approaches to the Schelde with machine guns. The battalion then occupied houses near the river, and handed over the town to the 231st Brigade (74th Division). This brigade had made the seizure of the bridge at the northern end of the town its first object, but could get no farther than the Tournai–Pont à Chin road, and had there left posts to command the passages by the three town bridges. An airman soon afterwards reported that all the bridges in the town except the one at the northern end had been blown up.

Towards 10 a.m. Major-General Jeudwine sent a message to the 166th and 165th Brigades to cross the Schelde during the night and meantime to give the men as much rest as possible, to reconnoitre and select routes and crossing places and to get up bridging material. Between 11 p.m. and midnight (8th/9th) the 1/5th South Lancashire (166th Brigade) and the 1/6th King's (165th Brigade) by use of rafts, collapsible boats and two light bridges, crossed the Schelde without opposition, and by dawn had formed a bridgehead. Two pontoon bridges were laid, and by 8.25 a.m. the 55th Division heard that both brigades had all their advanced-guard troops across the river and that they had reached their first objective, Gueronde–Tournai (exclusive).

The 74th Division was in the western half of Tournai, but the 47th and 59th Divisions on its left were unable to make any progress. About 6 a.m. the enemy's artillery fire ceased, pointing to a withdrawal, but otherwise he remained active and alert, and machine-gun and trench-mortar fire was opened whenever patrols tried to advance, and an

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attempt to widen the Cabaret Liétard bridgehead, on the extreme left, failed ; so little could be done except to turn harassing fire on to the tracks and roads.

At 4 p.m. Fifth Army headquarters, cancelling all previous instructions, issued written orders for I, III and XI Corps to press the enemy with the object of driving in his rear guards and reaching the river Dendre, the first and minimum objective being the original second objective, the line la Croix–Wasmes–Liberchies–Velaines, and the next objective a line through Leuze : the Cavalry Corps[1] was to send one brigade (the 9th of the 1st Cavalry Division) to the III Corps, which would detail a regiment and a section R.H.A. to both the I and XI Corps : what remained of the corps was to move towards Hollain—by cross-country tracks as far as possible.

On the 9th November the retreat of the enemy was continued all along the front of the Fifth Army, and no opposition was encountered except by the mounted troops (C Squadron, King Edward's Horse) of the 55th Division, which, riding nearly to Leuze (the reported enemy position) came under machine-gun and trench-mortar fire, and by the inner flanks of the 74th and 47th Divisions from machine guns in Breuze Farm north of Rumillies, which was soon disposed of.

The 16th Division stood fast, the 15th Division taking over its front. The 58th, 15th and 55th Divisions sent forward brigade groups of all arms under the commanders of the 175th, 174th, 44th and 164th Brigades. They found the roads badly cratered ; but the Germans had gone, and an airman reported that the inhabitants were out waving flags, who later helped to repair the roads and make rough bridges over streams. The day's objective was attained by all three divisions about 5 p.m. and they put out posts beyond it. By corps orders, the 58th Division went on to Peruwelz and across the Antoing–Pommereuil canal.

In the 74th Division the 10/Shropshire L.I. (231st Brigade) crossed the Schelde at 7 a.m. by a footbridge thrown by the engineers at the northern end of Tournai,[2] establishing by

[1] Its headquarters were at Seclin (5 miles south of Lille) with the brigades on a line about five miles to the front. The 7th Cavalry Brigade (3rd Cavalry Division) was under orders to join the Second Army.

[2] The King's Shropshire Light Infantry already bore " Tournai " (1794) as a battle honour.

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means of a chain of posts a bridgehead through the Faubourg de Morelle. At 11 a.m. the advance was continued through this by the rest of the 231st Brigade. Except for fire already mentioned from Breuze Farm, no opposition was encountered and the objective was reached just before night fall.

The 47th and 59th Division (Major-Generals Sir G. F. Gorringe and N. M. Smyth) received a few bursts of machine-gun fire during the night ; but at dawn it was reported and confirmed that the enemy posts had been withdrawn from the eastern bank of the river. Footbridges were thrown, the 1/17th London (140th Brigade) (Br.-General H. B. P. L. Kennedy) crossed and, making its way through marsh and standing water, the whole battalion was on the line la Tombe–Kain by 11 a.m. covering its bridges. The 1/22nd London (142nd Brigade) (Br.-General R. McDouall) on the left had occupied Mont St. Aubert by 9.20 a.m., and both brigades went on towards noon about two miles to the line Rumillies—western edge of Mourcourt. By 2.30 p.m. a pontoon bridge with approaches was ready west of la Tombe, and a section of 18-pdrs for each brigade crossed, and these were followed by the rest of the 236th Brigade R.F.A. and the first-line transport. The cyclists which had gone forward received fire from Melles. In the evening, on learning that the divisions on the right and left were farther forward, the 140th and 142nd Brigades advanced to the line Melles—east edge of Mourcourt, to find that the Germans had left Melles only a quarter of an hour earlier.

The 178th Brigade (Br.-General T. W. Stansfeld) of the 59th Division, in the small bridgehead already established, had the 11/R. Scots Fusiliers across the Schelde by 8.30 a.m., and preceded by King Edward's Horse, about midday, reached the objective without incident, except the capture of a German major, disguised in plain clothes, in Velaines.

At night the 9th Cavalry Brigade (Br.-General D' A. Legard), less the 8th Hussars which went to the 58th Division, came up to Gaurain in the 55th Division area. Orders were sent by the Fifth Army for the Cavalry Corps (less its detachments) to move at 8 a.m. on the 10th to the Schelde between Maulde and Antoing, but not to cross the river that day. Lieut.-General Kavanagh considered that an opportunity to use cavalry was being missed ; but the congestion on the roads and bridges in the I Corps area was such that, after appeal to G.H.Q., he could get no more than a half-

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promise from Major-General C. B. B. White, the senior General Staff officer of the Fifth Army, that, if possible, the 1st Cavalry Brigade should be sent forward to Blaton to turn the defences of the Blaton canal, as originally planned ; but this, as will be seen, proved unnecessary.

For the 10th the Fifth Army had an oblique objective, as the First Army on its right was farther ahead than the Second on its left. The I Corps gave as objective for the 58th and 15th Divisions a line from Neufmaison north-westwards to Beloeil and Blicquy. The III Corps gave the 55th Division the high ground Leuze–Grandmetz ; it had the 9th Cavalry Brigade with it, but, the brigade being less the 8th Hussars, with the I Corps, and the 19th Hussars, now to be sent to the XI Corps, consisted of only one regiment, the 15th Hussars. Br.-General Legard, its commander, being senior to Br.-General Stockwell (164th Brigade), was given command of the 164th Brigade Group, The 74th Division (Major-General E. S. Girdwood) was to reach Herquegies–Montreuil au Bois. The XI Corps allotted to the 47th Division the passages of the Petit Rhosnes and the Rhosnes at Moustier and Frasnes, and to the 59th Division the road leading northward from Frasnes. Each of the three corps, now having a cavalry regiment at its disposal, it was hoped that the mounted troops would be able to push on and seize the passages of the Blaton canal and its continuation, the Dendre (canalized), some nine or ten miles ahead.

The 58th and 15th Divisions (I Corps) reached their objective without opposition. The 1st Cavalry Brigade (Br.-General H. S. Sewell) was given priority on all roads, even at the cost of delay to the infantry ; but it did not receive the corps order to move until 9.40 a.m., and it was 5 p.m. before the leading regiment crossed the canal at Blaton (at the junction with the Pommereuil canal), and quite dark before it caught up the infantry at Neuf Maison and bivouacked behind them.

In the III Corps the 74th Division went no farther than the Leuze–Frasnes railway, with outposts in the Bois de la Motte, and the 55th Division took over the whole frontage, led by Legard's Force, which went forward at 7 a.m., moving on Ath. Leuze was found evacuated, and the mounted troops cleared away slight opposition offered at Ligne and Villers St. Amand ; but fire from the Moulbaix–Ath road stopped

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further direct progress, and all bridges over the Dendre canal being in the enemy's hands any outflanking movement was impossible. Explosions and heavy smoke could be heard and seen in the vicinity of Ath railway station; so at 2 p.m., when the leading infantry came up, the 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers was ordered to attack on a front of a thousand yards with its left on the Petit Dendre, in order to secure the two bridges in Ath over the Dendre. The movement was covered by a machine-gun barrage fired by a company of the 55th Machine Gun Battalion, and its flanks were protected by cavalry. This attack was unsuccessful. By working from house to house, however, the canal was reached and by constant bursts of fire the Germans were prevented from blowing up the railway bridge. Legard's Force billeted in Villers St. Amand and the villages west of Ath. By evening the other two brigades of the 55th Division, the 166th and 165th, had closed up to a line behind the cavalry just short of Villers St. Amand.

On the left the 47th and 59th Divisions of the XI Corps reached their objective, the Leuze–Frasnes railway, and thence the road northward without incident; but the 19th Hussars, which joined and preceded them, reaching Moustier at 10.10 a.m., and Frasnes at 10.30 a.m., were fired on by machine guns from the high ground and wood east of the line Buissenal–Pironche. The enemy was forced to withdraw by the fire of a section of Y Battery R.H.A. but patrols failed to get touch of him again. The infantry outpost line at night was about two thousand yards east of the railway. Except at Ath, therefore, the Fifth Army, in spite of good progress had lost touch of the enemy.

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CHAPTER XXXIV

The Retirement of the Germans from the Schelde (*concluded*)

The Second Army

8th–10th November

(Sketches 33, 34)

The II Corps (9th, 31st and 34th Divisions) which had been on the left of the Second Army,[1] and actually in the French area, having been withdrawn into reserve on the 1st November on relief by the French, the Army frontage along the Schelde after that date was held by three corps: the XV (14th and 40th Divisions), the X (29th, 30th and 36th Divisions) and the XIX (35th, and 41st Divisions, with the 31st transferred from II Corps on the 4th November). The Germans continued to resist all attempts to cross the Schelde; but the Second Army "Daily Summary of Information" issued on the 8th November stated that the enemy had begun to withdraw opposite the Fifth Army on the right, and that there were indications that the movement —as forecast by Sir Douglas Haig at the conference on the previous day[2]—might extend northwards to the front of the Second Army. Fires seen in the German back areas and explosions heard during the 8th seemed to confirm this. The general opinion expressed by influential inhabitants was that little resistance would be offered west of the canal line Charleroi–Brussels–Antwerp, thirty miles or more from the Schelde, and air photographs showed lengths of trenches dug on the eastern bank of the canal with signs of support trenches in the southern portion.[3] No intermediate lines had been reported.

Preparations for forcing the passage of the Schelde on the 11th were continued, and at 6 p.m. (8th) General Plumer issued a formal order notifying that zero hour would be

[1] See Sketch 33.

[2] See p. 452.

[3] This defence line was part of the projected Meuse–Antwerp position. See End-paper B.

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6.30 a.m., but as the French Sixth Army would start half an hour later, the left of the XIX Corps should move in conjunction with the right of the French VII Corps: both Armies would open the bombardment to cover the passage at 3.30 a.m.

The enemy did begin retirement on the 8th, and by dawn on the 9th, as will be seen, a number of infantry units of the Second Army were able to establish themselves on the eastern bank of the Schelde.

The 8th November was wet. A marked decrease in enemy gun-fire was noticed, and at 6.30 p.m. it ceased. Probing patrol operations to ascertain whether the enemy was still defending the line of the Schelde had been continued; in the 40th Division (Major-General Sir W. E. Peyton) a patrol sent out at 9 a.m. established a post across the river in a crater west of Herinnes, being fired on by only three machine guns. At 2 p.m. two other patrols almost reached the village, being stopped again by no more than three machine guns which remained in action until dark. Pontoon bridges were constructed and at 8.30 p.m. both front-line battalions of the division, the 13/East Lancashire and 12/North Staffordshire (119th Brigade, Br.-General F. P. Crozier), began to cross by them. By 2 a.m. (9th) they had occupied a line beyond the Tournai–Herinnes railway.

The 14th Division (Major-General P. C. B. Skinner) made no move on the 8th, the day being spent in reconnoitring to discover routes across the swamps on its front; it was finally decided that transport must pass north and south of them. At 2 a.m. (9th) a platoon of the 12/Suffolk crossed the river at sluice-gates north-west of Herinnes, and organized a bridgehead.

In the sector of the 29th Division (Major-General D. E. Cayley) a patrol of the 4/Worcestershire (88th Brigade, Br.-General B. C. Freyberg), sent out at 3 a.m. (8th), could find no Germans in the area between the Schelde and le Grand Courant (which was in flood) but drew fire. After explosions had been heard, at midnight (8th/9th) a company, followed by the rest of the battalion, crossed le Grand Courant unopposed and took up position along the Gueamignies–Escanaffles road. A company of the 2/Leinster (88th Brigade) also crossed both water lines during the night of the 8th/9th, and by dawn was in Espinois, whose inhabitants

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said the enemy had left at 9 p.m., after blowing up road junctions.

In the sector of the 30th Division (Major-General W. de L. Williams) at 1 a.m. (9th) the 201st Field Company R.E. constructed four footbridges, by which, at 3 a.m., two platoons of the 2/17th London (89th Brigade, Br.-General R. A. M. Currie) crossed the Schelde and established themselves unopposed on the eastern bank. North of them a company of the 2/South Lancashire tried to cross, using two small rafts which carried 2 men apiece ; it encountered considerable machine-gun fire, one raft being sunk, and it was not until daylight that the whole company was on the eastern bank, where, after rushing a post, it occupied Escanaffles.

The XIX Corps had all three of its divisions in the line from Rugge to the international boundary. The 31st Division (Major-General J. Campbell) on the right, with the support of artillery, machine guns and trench mortars, established a line of posts on the western bank of the Schelde during the 8th ; the daylight patrols of the 41st Division (Major-General S. T. B. Lawford), on the left, were fired on ; but at 9 p.m., when all was quiet except for occasional bursts of machine-gun fire, a patrol of 40 men of the 11/Queen's (123rd Brigade, Br.-General M. Kemp-Welch), with the aid of sappers of the 237th Field Company R.E., crossed by means of a single collapsible canvas boat carrying only 8 men at a time, and reached and cleared Meersche, a long ribbon of a village lying across the front. On news of this success reaching battalion headquarters at 11 p.m., the patrol was ordered to push on and make good the Escanaffles–Audenarde railway, about half a mile ahead. The rest of the 11/Queen's followed, crossing the Schelde piecemeal by the one boat, so that it was 3 a.m. (9th) before the unit was assembled in Meersche. A company was sent southwards to Berchem, where it captured one German, and by 3.30 a.m. patrols were well on their way to Nukerke, on the high ground beyond the railway.

Patrols of the 35th Division (Major-General A. H. Marindin) in the centre of the XIX Corps front, had been unable to cross the Schelde during the 8th ; but when at 11 p.m., the 105th Brigade (Br.-General A. J. Turner) received information that the 41st Division had passed troops over the

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river and into Meersche, the 15/Sherwood Foresters and the attached 18/Highland L.I. (106th Brigade, Br.-General J. H. W. Pollard) were ordered to push out patrols and cross the Schelde. All was still, but unfortunately no bridges were available—the Berchem bridge was completely down—and no bridging material was immediately to hand. Thus it was not until 5.30 a.m. (9th) that the Highland L.I., and 7 a.m. that the Foresters began to cross, and they were entirely unopposed.

When day dawned on the 9th, therefore, no doubt existed that the enemy's retreat was now general on the whole of the Second Army's front. On the front of the French Sixth Army, on the left, the Germans seem to have held on to the Schelde a little longer.[1]

Progress of the advanced guards during the 9th November was rapid and without incident, and a north–south line through Renaix was reached except on the extreme right. Few Germans were seen, even by the cyclists who pushed ahead ; air observers saw considerable railway activity, but only the scattered movement of rear guards withdrawing on the roads. The orders for attack on the 11th were cancelled and the immediate passage of the Schelde substituted ; but the advance of the main bodies was delayed by their having to wait for additional bridges to be thrown, and in the case of the XV Corps by the causeway to Herinnes being impassable for transport for many hours. The 29th Division (X Corps) therefore took over its front.

Ahead lay hilly and wooded country, the main ridges forming a cross in plan, the upright running north and south with the intersection of its arms about three miles east of Renaix.

At 7.30 p.m. Army headquarters issued orders for the advance to be resumed on the 10th. To ease the supply situation, as in the other Armies, the Second Army was to spread out in depth, with two corps leading : the X Corps (less the 36th Division) and the XIX Corps were directed to occupy the whole of the long north–south ridge, St. Sauveur–Nukerke (here called the St. Sauveur ridge) and then to push

[1] See Note at end of Chapter.

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eastwards as far as possible; the XV Corps (with the 36th Division transferred from the X) and the II Corps, were to move forward in second line in accord with the general advance, with their leading divisions one day's march in rear of the front corps, and the remaining divisions a second day's march behind; the leading division of the II Corps, however, was to halt on the 10th on a named line so that this corps would fall into third echelon. Orders were issued by the leading corps as regards watching roads and dealing with local traffic should an armistice be signed.

On the 10th the X and XIX Corps, aided by valuable air reconnaissance of the 53rd Squadron R.A.F.—which made it unnecessary to "crown" the east–west ridge lying north of Renaix—sent forward all five divisions in line. Their advanced guards, preceded by cyclists, and in the case of the 29th Division, by a squadron of the 7th Dragoon Guards,[1] met with no substantial resistance. By 10.15 a.m. the X Corps heard that the cyclists of the 30th Division, on the left, after driving back some German cavalry on the St. Sauveur ridge, were beyond that ridge at Ellezelles, which the infantry reached about 2 p.m., and were pushing on. At 3 p.m. it was known that the infantry of the 29th Division was on the ridge near the Bois de Leuze, and had seen no sign of any Germans, but that a troop of the 7th Dragoon Guards, ordered to get possession of Lahamaide on the high ground two miles from the crest of the ridge, was held up by the fire of machine guns, and was unable to reach the little town.

The troops of the XIX Corps met with hardly any opposition and secured the top of the northern half of the St. Sauveur ridge, with outposts well beyond.

The day ended, therefore, with the St. Sauveur ridge securely held, with outposts to the east on the north–south

[1] The 7th Cavalry Brigade, detached from the 3rd Cavalry Division to the Second Army by G.H.Q. instructions, had reached Tourcoing from Wahagnies, 20 miles to the south on the previous day; the 7th Dragoon Guards were allotted to the X Corps and the 17th Lancers to the XIX. Their advance was hindered by the mass of troops and transport which were crossing the bridges thrown over the Schelde. The former regiment crossed in its turn at Avelghem and advanced four miles beyond; the 17th Lancers got as far as Waermaerde but did not cross the Schelde, so the XIX Corps had no cavalry in this last stage.

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road which runs west of Lahamaide, on roughly the same line as its neighbours the Fifth Army and the French Sixth Army.

NOTE

THE FRENCH AND BELGIANS IN FLANDERS 8TH–10TH NOVEMBER

(Sketch 34)

On the 8th the three divisions holding the front of the three corps of the French Sixth Army tried to throw infantry parties across the Schelde, but only with great difficulty did a few companies reach the eastern bank between Audenarde and Eecke (in the XXXIV Corps sector). During the night of the 8th/9th and during the 9th the " activity of the German infantry and artillery " diminished markedly " and the VII Corps and right of the XXX Corps pushed their advanced guards over the river as the British had done ; the Belgians reached the Ghent canal on their whole front from Ghent station to the Dutch frontier.

On the 10th the 41st Division (VII Corps) and the 12th Division (XXX Corps) advanced east of the Schelde, only the right of the former encountering any opposition. The XXXIV Corps still stood fast on the Schelde, except that the American 37th Division, passed some battalions to the right bank by existing footbridges in the XXX Corps sector. The Belgians remained on the Ghent canal.

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CHAPTER XXXV

The Armistice

The 11th November, 1918

(Frontispiece ; End-paper A ; Sketches 33, 36, 37, 39, 40)

The Armistice was signed at 5.5 a.m. on the 11th November, and at 6.50 a.m. the following message was sent to Armies from Advanced G.H.Q. :

> " Hostilities will cease at 11.00 hours to-day, " November 11th. Troops will stand fast on the line " reached at that hour, which will be reported by wire " to Advanced G.H.Q. Defensive precautions will be " maintained. There will be no intercourse of any " description with the enemy until the receipt of instruc- " tions from G.H.Q. Further instructions follow ".

This message reached the headquarters of the five Armies between 7.5 and 7.30 a.m. The less than four hours' interval gave barely time for the information to reach the front-line troops, and hostilities, both on the ground and in the air, were continued until the last moment.

During the night of the 10th/11th the R.A.F. had dropped 20 tons of bombs on railway junctions and stations near the front, besides making raids on Enghien and Liége ; but the enemy's air force was inactive. Towards dawn, which was cold and foggy, the day becoming fair though misty later, both artillery and machine-gun fire died down. The procedure in the five Armies varied.

The Fourth Army[1]

The advanced guard squadrons of the 20th Hussars and 12th Lancers (5th Cavalry Brigade) found the enemy in the same positions as overnight, and the South African Brigade, already in contact at Hestrud, reported to the same effect. At 10.15 a.m. a staff officer of the 66th Division arrived with orders for Br.-General Tanner that hostilities would end at 11 a.m. This information had apparently been received

[1] See Sketch 39.

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earlier by the Germans, as their artillery fire had considerably increased; the diary of the South African Brigade records: "evidently he [the enemy] was determined not to "have much surplus ammunition when the fateful hour "arrived".

The 199th Brigade at Clairfays had at 7 a.m. sent forward two battalions, each with two 18-pdrs. attached, by the available roads, the 18/King's via l'Eppe Sauvage on Vieux Sart, with a flank guard on Montbliart, and the 9/Manchester via Sivry on Renlies. They were to drive off screens of machine guns or infantry, but not to fight a general action. The King's encountered no opposition and gained touch with the French, whose 51st Division, having taken l'Eppe Sauvage, was also marching on Montbliart. The Manchester met with no opposition until beyond Sivry, and were engaged there when 11 a.m. struck.

THE THIRD ARMY[1]

In the Third Army the 62nd and Guards Divisions of the VI Corps, now the advanced guard of the Army, did no more than push forward their infantry outposts and cyclist patrols. The 4th Cavalry Brigade had orders to advance to the road Beaumont (4 miles east of Cousolre)—Solre sur Sambre–Rouveroy–Givry (2 miles north-west of Rouveroy) and from there to send forward patrols. The left section of the road was reached, but south of Solre sur Sambre the enemy was found to be still holding the line of the Thure.

THE FIRST ARMY[2]

In the First Army all three corps continued the advance. The XXII Corps had overnight detailed the 63rd Division to act as advanced guard and, preceded by the 16th Lancers, the 188th and 190th Brigades went forward unopposed to a road east of Villers St. Ghislain, which was the first bound and reached just before 11 a.m.

[1] See Sketch 36.

[2] See Sketch 37.

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After the capture of Mons in the early morning the 4th and 7th Canadian Brigades, with a squadron of the 5th Lancers (3rd Cavalry Brigade)—the rest of the regiment protecting the left flank of this movement—continued to advance. In spite of some artillery action, they easily drove off the German posts and secured the line of low hills, St. Symphorien–Nimy, east of Mons, and by 11 a.m. had advanced a further four miles.

The VIII Corps made another great effort to come abreast of the Canadians. The front was divided between the 23rd Brigade (8th Division) on the right and the 155th and 157th Brigades (52nd Division) on the left, with the 4th Hussars (3rd Cavalry Brigade) leading. The Nimy–Jurbise road was given, as the first objective for the infantry, and this was reached, with cavalry outposts out beyond it, by 10.45 a.m. No opposition was encountered except in the early morning when some fire came from the Mons–Jurbise railway in the Bois de Baudour.

The Fifth Army[1]

During the afternoon of the 10th the Fifth Army issued orders for the Cavalry Corps (less 2nd Cavalry Division and other detachments) to cross the Schelde and to halt as soon as the line of the Blaton canal and the river Dendre was reached, and form bridgeheads to cover the crossings. The corps was then to collect all detachments, except the 7th Cavalry Brigade detached to the Second Army, and press eastwards, driving in the enemy's rear guards, in the general direction of Soignies (14 miles south-east of Ath) and Nivelles (25 miles E.S.E. of Ath); the cavalry was given priority on the roads, but as far as possible was to avoid using them. On the night of the 10th/11th, the 1st Cavalry Division (the 2nd Cavalry Brigade was still with headquarters) was around Antoing, and the 3rd (with the 6th and Canadian Cavalry Brigades) to the south-east at Maubray. The I Corps ordered the 58th and 15th Divisions to establish bridgeheads about two and a half miles beyond the canal on the line Neufmaison–Chièvres–Nevergnies, covered by the

[1] See Sketch 40.

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1st Cavalry Brigade, which would then revert to the Cavalry Corps. The III Corps ordered the 55th Division to capture the crossings about Ath and form a bridgehead east of the town, and the 74th Division (halted behind Bois de la Motte) to take over most of the XI Corps frontage, cover the left of the 55th Division and then gain the crossings between Isières and Lessines: this done, both divisions were to cross the Dendre and advance to a line about three miles beyond it; the 47th Division (XI Corps) was then to move up to Papignies and cover the left flank.

During the night the enemy withdrew from his position near Ath, and by 11 a.m., except on the left, where only the first stage of crossing the Dendre was completed, the objectives indicated were reached. At 7 a.m. the Cavalry Corps headquarters heard of the Armistice by telephone from the Fifth Army and sent motor cyclists, despatch riders and wireless messages to order the troops of the two cavalry divisions to stand fast, confirming the information by officers sent in motor cars.

The cavalry units attached to the three corps were also stopped; but the message did not reach the mounted troops, King Edward's Horse and cyclists, attached to the 55th Division; one cavalry patrol reached Silly (5 miles beyond Ath), where a gun was seen, and was about to surround the village when news of the Armistice came through. A cyclist patrol, on arrival at Silly station just as the news arrived, found a German officer and 20 men. The corporal in command called on them to surrender, saying his orders were to remain at the farthest point reached, and on the German officer demurring offered to fight for the station. Thereupon the Germans withdrew.

THE SECOND ARMY[1]

The orders to the X Corps issued on the evening of the 10th were to the effect that its two divisions (29th and 30th) should advance at 8 a.m. and do their utmost to establish outposts on the Dendre, but their reserve brigades and the mass of their artillery should not cross the river: the boundary with the Fifth Army would be Lahamaide–Lessines

[1] See Sketch 33.

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(both to the Second Army). On the 7th Dragoon Guards (less the squadron with the 29th Division) arriving at Sottenières (4 miles east of Ellezelles) about 9 a.m. it received orders to seize the crossings of the Dendre at les Deux Acren, in advance of the 30th Division.

The three divisions of the XIX Corps (31st, 35th, 41st), starting at 9 a.m., were to make good a line through Everbecq, about 2½ miles from the Dendre and overlooking its course: motor machine guns, with infantry companies in support, would push forward to the river and, if possible, seize the bridges at Overboulaere, Grammont and Schendelbeke: the attached 17th Lancers were not required to move.

On receipt at 8.10 a.m. of the Army orders to cease hostilities at 11 a.m., the XIX Corps instructed its three divisions to make every effort to reach the line of the Dendre by that hour. They succeeded in doing so without incident at and around Grammont; but poor country roads prevented equally good progress on the flanks where, on the left, the French were now abreast.[1]

The 7th Dragoon Guards, leading the advance of the X Corps, came into contact with the enemy at two places. Ten minutes before 11 a.m. the advanced-guard squadron was fired on from the eastern exits of Ghoy (north-west of Lessines). The G.O.C. of the 30th Division, who was at the front, ordered the squadron to halt, and it occupied an outpost position west of the village.

The detached squadron with the 29th Division which had been checked at Lahamaide on the previous evening had a happier experience. At 7 a.m. the officer commanding, Major W. F. Chappell, heard from his outpost troop that the enemy had retired, and he therefore sent a troop to reconnoitre the main road to Lessines and hold the crossing of the Dendre at that place. Two hours later Br.-General Freyberg (88th Brigade) commanding the advanced guard of the 29th Division, arrived and informed Major Chappell of the Armistice, but ordered the squadron to move off as he particularly wished to seize Lessines before 11 a.m. struck. The squadron galloped forward to the outpost troop, picked it up and continued past Lahamaide towards Lessines. About 10.45 a.m. the reconnoitring troop was found held

[1] See Sketch 34.

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up by 5 machine guns and some snipers about a mile west of the village ; after a halt of three minutes parties were sent forward on either side of the high road and the squadron followed. They rushed Lessines, captured 24 other ranks and a machine gun on the western edge, and a total of 3 officers and 103 other ranks in the village, and secured intact the bridges which had been prepared for demolition. Pressing on to the high ground on the east, the 7th Dragoon Guards captured another officer and 40 men. As it was by now after 11 a.m., these prisoners were released, but, at the earnest request of the senior officer, were escorted to their own lines in order to protect them from the fury of the inhabitants. Thus did hostilities come to an end.

During the offensives of 1918 which had been begun on the 18th July, when the French attacked the Soissons salient, over a third of a million Germans and over six thousand, six hundred guns had been captured. The totals were distributed thus :—

	Prisoners	Guns
British Armies	188,700	2,840
French Armies	139,000	1,880
American Armies	43,300	1,421
Belgian Armies	14,500	474

Which armies bore the brunt of the fighting in the last stage cannot, therefore, be doubted.

The following general instructions were issued from G.H.Q. by telegraph between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. to all Armies :

" 1) Our own troops will not advance east of line " gained by them at hour when hostilities ceased. Our " aeroplanes will keep a distance of not less than a " mile behind this line, except for the purpose of driving " back hostile aeroplanes as indicated in paragraph (3).

" 2) There is to be no unauthorized intercourse or " fraternization of any description with enemy. He " will not be permitted to approach our lines and any " attempt to do so will be immediately stopped, if " necessary by fire. Any parties of enemy coming

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" over to our lines under a white flag will be made " prisoner and fact reported.

" 3) No enemy aircraft will be permitted to cross the " line. Should any make the attempt to do so they will " be attacked by fire from ground and from air.

" 4) All commanders are to pay strictest attention to " discipline, smartness and well-being of their troops, " so as to ensure highest state of efficiency being main- " tained throughout British forces. Troops will be " given every opportunity for rest, training, recreation " and leave.

" 5) Passage of civilians through our lines in either " direction will be regulated in accordance with instruc- " tions which will be issued separately. In the meantime " no civilians will be permitted to pass in either " direction ".

When 11 a.m. came the troops took the occasion in their usual matter of fact way : there was no outburst of cheering, no wild scene of rejoicing. Those who could lay down to sleep. The others went quietly about their duty with the strange feeling that all danger was absent. But after dark all gave way to rejoicing, searchlights wobbled in the sky, coloured lights of every description and S.O.S. signals illuminated the front lines, rockets went whizzing into the air, and field batteries fired their star shells. Some adventurous spirits lit bonfires, exploded small ammunition dumps and laid trails of guncotton and explosives which ran spluttering over the countryside like huge fiery serpents.

By Article VIII of the Armistice terms the Germans handed over a large number of plans showing where mines and delay-action charges had been placed. As a result, about half the Tunnelling Companies R.E., assisted by Germans, were entrusted with their removal.[1] It turned out that the information given by the enemy was not absolutely accurate, being the scheme rather than the record of the work, and it proved useful only as a general guide. When this was discovered German officers were detailed to assist in locating the mines, and the work continued for many weeks. Some of

[1] The other tunnelling companies were engaged on road mending bridge building and the repair of waterworks.

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the charges exploded before they were located, but hundreds were removed with a total of nearly two million pounds of explosive. Considering the hazardous nature of the work, the casualties were slight, only one British officer and 7 sappers being killed. The charges by destroying bridges and cratering roads, would have greatly embarrassed an advance, as those already overrun had done.

Whether if the Germans had continued to resist the advance could have been continued must remain an open question. The state of the communications in November and December is described at length in "Transportation".[1] Grave difficulties had to be overcome, but it must be remembered that after the Armistice the railways and roads in the British area were largely used in the service of the French and Belgian Governments for normal requirements, even for passenger trains, and that "military trains did not always receive priority over non-military trains".

In the closing days of the War the opposition came only from artillery and machine guns, which fell back before very small British forces—each division being represented at the front by rarely more than a squadron and a battalion with a few cyclists; the Americans had already reached one of the vital German railway lines of communication at Mezières; the French flank attack from Lorraine, about to be delivered, might have led either to a major German disaster in the field, or a retirement approximating to a rout,[2] and revolution had broken out in Germany. In the event, in spite of the road and railway conditions, the Q.M.G. stated on the 13th November that he could maintain 40 divisions on the German frontier as a fighting force engaged in active warfare; the Cavalry Corps and sixteen divisions did follow the Germans to their frontier, and one cavalry division and eleven divisions went on to the Rhine.

[1] See pp. 466–87. The question is further discussed in the Retrospect, Chapter XXXVII.

[2] See Note III at end of Chapter.

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NOTE I

CASUALTIES

27TH SEPTEMBER—12TH NOVEMBER

(The figures available are not complete, Army and corps troops, artillery and tanks not being included.)

I. ESTIMATED INFANTRY AND CAVALRY BATTLE CASUALTIES OF DIVISIONS PRINCIPALLY ENGAGED. REPORTED TO THE ADJUTANT-GENERAL AS OCCURRING DURING THE PERIOD 27TH SEPTEMBER TO 9 A.M. 12TH NOVEMBER.

	By Divisions		Total	
	Officers	Other Ranks	Officers	Other Ranks
FIRST ARMY				
4th Division	48	1,500		
8th ,, ...	1	150		
11th ,, ...	72	2,150		
12th ,, ...	6	100		
49th ,, ...	106	3,630		
51st ,, ...	72	2,319		
56th ,, ...	34	1,250		
58th ,, ...	10	200		
63rd ,, ...	1	50		
1st Canadian Division ..	181	3,850		
2nd ,, ,, ..	64	1,875		
3rd ,, ,, ..	131	3,330		
4th ,, ,, ..	210	5,065		
			936	25,469
SECOND ARMY				
9th Division	130	3,150		
14th ,, ...	5	100		
29th ,, ...	85	2,450		
30th ,, ...	15	376		
31st ,, ...	50	925		
34th ,, ...	34	800		
35th ,, ...	100	2,850		
36th ,, ...	110	3,087		
40th ,, ...	6	200		
41st ,, ...	121	2,940		
			656	16,878
THIRD ARMY				
Guards Division	52	1,700		
2nd ,, ...	48	1,665		
3rd ,, ...	120	3,941		

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	By Divisions		Total	
THIRD ARMY—*contd.*	Officers	Other Ranks	Officers	Other Ranks
5th Division	90	2,300		
17th ,, ...	115	2,900		
19th ,, ...	35	880		
21st ,, ...	80	2,800		
24th ,, ...	48	1,825		
33rd ,, ...	113	3,876		
37th ,, ...	86	2,295		
38th ,, ...	112	1,790		
42nd ,, ...	82	1,650		
52nd ,, ...	57	755		
57th ,, ...	46	1,280		
61st ,, ...	32	1,050		
62nd ,, ...	64	2,470		
63rd ,, ...	96	4,020		
New Zealand Division ..	108	2,736		
			1,384	39,933
FOURTH ARMY				
1st Division	62	1,870		
6th ,, ...	78	2,291		
12th ,, ...	5	—		
18th ,, ...	88	1,850		
25th ,, ...	137	3,440		
32nd ,, ...	114	3,270		
46th ,, ...	90	2,900		
50th ,, ...	164	3,977		
55th ,, ...	4	50		
66th ,, ...	75	2,120		
2nd Australian Division	73	1,203		
3rd ,, ,,	25	231		
			915	23,202
FIFTH ARMY				
47th Division	1	150		
55th ,, ...	10	170		
59th ,, ...	6	50		
61st ,, ...	4	110		
74th ,, ...	3	50		
			24	530
CAVALRY CORPS				
1st Cavalry Division ..	10	130		
3rd ,, ,, ..	19	335		
			29	465
Total	Infantry and Cavalry		3,944	106,477

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II. TOTAL ESTIMATED CASUALTIES, INFANTRY AND CAVALRY ONLY, 7TH AUGUST TO 12TH NOVEMBER

	Officers	Other Ranks
From 7th August to 20th August	1,662	31,720
From 21st August to 17th September	4,640	101,303
From 18th September to 26th September ..	1,240	24,162
From 27th September to 9 a.m. 12th November	6,061	127,337
Total—7th August to 9 a.m. 12th November	13,603	284,522

ESTIMATED TANK CORPS BATTLE CASUALTIES REPORTED AS OCCURRING DURING THE PERIOD 21ST AUGUST TO 9 A.M. 12TH NOVEMBER

Officers .. 404 Other Ranks .. 2,012

ESTIMATED MACHINE-GUN CORPS BATTLE CASUALTIES REPORTED AS OCCURRING DURING THE PERIOD 21ST AUGUST TO 9 A.M. 12TH NOVEMBER

Officers .. 761 Other Ranks .. 12,904

NOTE II

THE INDEPENDENT BOMBING FORCE[1]

By the autumn of 1917 the aircraft production programme initiated at the beginning of the year was beginning to furnish results. It was expected that equipment surplus to the needs of the army would be available to increase direct action against the " material elements of aggression and other sources of existence " of the hostile army ". The German aeroplanes raids on London had demonstrated the potentialities of aircraft as a striking weapon. At the beginning of October, therefore, Major-General Trenchard, commanding the Royal Flying Corps, was instructed to take immediate action against German objectives which could be reached from the neighbourhood of Nancy ; and he formed a special unit, the 41st Wing, of two squadrons withdrawn from the British front and a naval squadron lent by the Admiralty. In May 1918 two more squadrons were added to the strength, and

[1] See " 1918 " Vol. III, p. 12 and 163. A full account will be found in " War in the Air " vi, pp. 101–74.

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on the 6th June 1918 the " Independent Force ", under Major-General Sir H. Trenchard, came officially into being, to operate independently of the sea and land forces. It comprised two wings, the 41st (3 day-bombing squadrons) and 83rd (2 night-bombing squadrons), with aerodromes in the Nancy area. In July a noticeable increase in the opposition from German fighter formations took place, and henceforward the casualties were considerable. In August the Independent Force was strengthened by 3 bombing squadrons from England and one from the B.E.F.; another joined from Italy in September.

In September the weather was unfavourable and in October " fog, mist and low clouds often made raiding impossible "; but squadrons co-operated at the request of Maréchal Foch with the French and American armies in their Argonne offensive. In the final days of the war unfavourable weather prevented long distance raids. In all, between 17th October 1917 and the 11th November 1918, 342 raids (only 10 in November 1918) were made on railways, industrial plant, barracks, bridges and, latterly, aerodromes. All these raids were made by single squadrons, with a number of aircraft varying from two to twelve.[1]

The organization of an independent bombing force of super-Handley Page machines, to work from Norfolk, was begun in September, 1918, but at the signing of the Armistice only three were ready.[2]

An Inter-Allied Independent Air Force, to take orders from Maréchal Foch, was projected, and Major-General Sir H. Trenchard was appointed on the 26th October 1918 to its command; but it did not come into existence.

NOTE III

The Projected Offensive in Lorraine[3]

(End-papers A and B)

On the 20th October Maréchal Foch directed General Pétain to prepare for an offensive in Lorraine: " The operations in " progress aim at driving the enemy back to the Meuse from " Stenay downwards. To break his defence of this river line by " taking it in rear, attacks should be made astride the Moselle " towards the Saar on one side and towards Luxembourg on the " other ". This was General Joffre's plan for the original offensive

[1] Details are given in " War in the Air " vi, Appendix XIII.

[2] " War in the Air " vi, pp. 173–4.

[3] The full account is in F.O.A. vii (ii), pp. 328 *et seq*, with Carte 16.

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on either side of Metz in 1914. The Directive continued that the reduction of the French frontage as a result of the general advance would make French divisions available, and the American Army could also provide some divisions.

General Pétain, having already considered a small scale attack of this kind, made the preliminary proposals on the 21st October, completing them on the 24th and 25th, and the movement of divisions was begun ; he estimated that 40 French divisions would be required and that, owing to the state of the railways, it would take 22 days from the 27th October to assemble them. On the 23rd October, therefore, Maréchal Foch abandoned the idea of the offensive west of the Moselle towards Luxembourg.

The general plan, put forward on the 30th by General de Castelnau (G.A.E.), who was to command the offensive, was to reinforce the Eighth Army, concentrate it on its right and insert a new Tenth Army, of equal strength, in the place of its left wing. The French Seventh Army was to protect the right and the American Second Army the left on the Metz side. Maréchal Foch did not approve of the two attacking Armies being of the same strength and having analogous tasks, and on the 3rd November laid down, " in the combined operations of the " Eighth and Tenth Armies, the Tenth Army will have to play " the principal part ; for the Eighth, operating in difficult country " with poor communications, will not be able to develop its " offensive ". On the 5th November, in view of the retreat begun by the Germans on the night of the 4th/5th November, General Pétain requested General de Castelnau to hurry forward the preparations and directed him to modify his instructions to the Eighth and Tenth Armies in the sense required by Maréchal Foch. This he did the next day, giving the former Army 10 divisions and the latter 13, the I Cavalry Corps and slightly more Army artillery and tanks.

After " a lively correspondence during the 6th to 9th ", about the 15th November was suggested as the day, and the morning of the 14th was finally fixed ; but General de Castelnau reported that at that date only the Tenth Army would be ready to operate with 15 divisions and the cavalry corps, the Eighth Army would have only five or six divisions, and would be only in a position to execute a " coup de main de diversion " and lend the Tenth the support of its artillery. It was decided to attack on the 14th with whatever troops were available. On the 10th all was reported ready for an attack on the 14th with 22 divisions (including, apparently, 4 American), 3 cavalry divisions, supported by 614 batteries of artillery and about 600 tanks. " On the German " side, only 6 divisions, of which 3 were *Landwehr*, held the " threatened front ". The Armistice put an end to the final preparations.

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NOTE IV

THE FRENCH AND AMERICANS 8TH–11TH NOVEMBER

(End-paper A ; Sketch 21)

During the last three days of hostilities the American Second and First Armies, the Second (seven divisions), hitherto restricted to raids and local operations, now joining in on a 35-mile front between Pont à Mousson and Fresnes, together with the French Fourth, Fifth, Third and First Armies, all made progress under much the same conditions as the British.

The French First Army, on reaching the la Chapelle–Avesnes road, reduced the number of divisions in front line from 12 to 4. Little progress was made on the 8th, " 1 to 3 kilometres, much " less than on the preceding days " ; on the 9th the railway junction of Hirson, vital for the communications of the German centre, was captured and preparations were made to withdraw the XXXI Corps, the centre formation, and apparently the XX also, for on the 10th only the VIII, XXXVI and XV were called on to remain in contact with the enemy, continuing to send their light units as far forward as possible ; " the XXXVI " Corps, marching by successive divisions, will try to reach " Chimay [it was reached on the 11th] as soon as possible, its " leading division will form the advanced guard of the Army and " will be given the maximum amount of cavalry ". Thus the French First Army adopted the formation ordered by the British Fourth Army on the previous day.

By the 11th November the American First Army, which pushed on rapidly, was across the Upper Meuse down to Mouzon (exclusive) and thence up to the river as far as Sedan ; and the Hauts de la Meuse had been gradually cleared. So, for the first time since 1914, the French positions around Verdun were completely free from the menace of these heights.

As regards the American-French boundary, which some French historians have claimed was not observed by the Americans so that they could reach Sedan first, General Pershing (p. 687) says :

> " Between November 1st and 7th the eastern boundary of " the [American] First Army was changed several times by " Marshal Foch, and the notification in more than one in- " stance reached Army Headquarters too late to be trans- " mitted to the troops in time to be effective. On the 7th " November the left of our [the American] army was limited " by Mouzon [that is the left boundary was swung through " 45° eastward], the original boundary not having been " definitely fixed as far north as Sedan [which its extension " would reach]. However, this change was not effected

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" until after the Armistice, as the French Fourth Army was " not prepared before that time to take over the sector ".

On the 6th November General Pershing had suggested to General Maistre (G.A.C.) :

" that the prescribed boundary line between our [American] " First Army and the French Fourth Army might be ignored " in case we outran the French [as the Americans did], " to which he offered no objection, but, on the contrary, " warmly approved ". (Pershing, p. 686).

" Many divisions of the [French] Fourth Army showed extreme " fatigue, and the important advance made since the 5th, the " bad state and crowding of the roads, rendered supply both of " rations and ammunition more and more difficult ". (F.O.A. vii (ii), p. 2021.) The detailed map for the French Fourth Army (F.O.A. vii (ii), Carte 77) shows the international boundary as running up to Sedan (to the French), not to Mouzon, and the text agrees, but the G.Q.G. map (Carte 1A) shows only the Mouzon boundary ; but it is frequently at variance with the Army map. The American I Corps (on the left) was to capture Sedan, " assis- " ted on its right by the V Corps ", and, in its anxiety to be there " first, the 1st Division of the V Corps crossed the front of the 42nd Division of the I Corps.[1] The morning of the 9th found men of the 1st and 42nd Divisions on the heights overlooking the city.

NOTE V

The Germans During 8th—11th November

During the final period the Germans continued their retirement to the Antwerp–Meuse Line. All the signs of a beaten army : refusal to obey orders, marauding and desertion, were already rife. The revolutionary movement had not yet affected the army ; but a soldiers' council is said, however, to have been formed at O.H.L., the first (Schwarte, p. 621) to co-ordinate action ; no others seemed to have come into existence before the Armistice. At the Armistice conference, however, Herr Erzberger demanded that operations should be stopped at once in order that order and discipline might be restored, so as to prevent the spread of Bolshevism which might extend to the Allies. Maréchal Foch merely remarked that " Bolshevism is the disease of the conquered ". About 2 p.m. on the 9th a Republic was proclaimed

[1] The G.O.C. of the 42nd Division was Br.-General Douglas MacArthur, in command in the South-West Pacific in 1942–5.

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in Berlin and Prince Max of Baden laid down his office of Chancellor, saying to his successor, "Herr Ebert, I commit the German Empire to your keeping". The new Chancellor by proclamation called on everyone to help the Fatherland by "continuing to work fearlessly and tirelessly, each man at his post".

At Spa thirty generals and colonels, summoned from the front, gave it as their opinion that the army could not be counted on to repress a revolution (which turned out to be untrue). General Gröner himself stated that mutineers were in possession of the Rhine bridges and the depôts and were preventing the transit of ammunition and rations (also untrue: there was some pilfering by line of communication troops: the Germans boast of the good order in which the troops marched and trained home from the Western Front). At 5 a.m. on the 10th November the Kaiser, by Field-Marshal von Hindenburg's advice, on the grounds that otherwise he could not be responsible for "My Sovereign's life", left Spa by train for Holland; he was followed in a few hours by the German Crown Prince. Peace at any price was what the army leaders wanted—in order to re-arm at leisure.

At the Armistice Conference the German delegates tried to obtain some amelioration of the conditions, particularly as to the continuation of the blockade. They complained that such terrible terms would entail the starvation of thousands of women and children in Germany—they did not: the women, and the children in particular, during the entry into Germany and the years of occupation were fat and well, very different to the French in the occupied territories. Maréchal Foch replied: "My "responsibility ends at the Rhine. I have no concern with the "rest of Germany. It is your affair. I would remind you that "this is a military armistice, that the war is not ended thereby, "and that it is directed at preventing your nation from continuing "the war. You must recollect a reply given by Bismarck in "1871, when we made a request similar to what you are making "now. Bismarck then said 'Krieg ist Krieg', and I say to you "'la guerre est la guerre'".

The German delegates also said—and this also proved untrue—that the evacuation could not be carried out as arranged, as it was a physical impossibility, and asked that the period might be lengthened from 14 days to two months. To this the Maréchal replied, "Nous verrons. Je vous assisterai". Their requests that the right wing of the German Armies might be allowed to march across the Limburg Appendix (Dutch Territory)—which it actually did—and that the amount of railway material and the number of lorries to be surrendered might be reduced, were both ignored.

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The German delegates referred the armistice terms to Berlin, and on the night of the 10th Erzberger received two telegrams. The first, in cipher, came at 8 p.m. from the Supreme Command and was signed "Hindenburg". It suggested that certain concessions should be obtained, but it ended, "if modifications "cannot be obtained accept nevertheless". The Supreme Command was greatly alarmed at any chance of hostilities not ceasing at once—and justifiably, for the Americans at Sedan were blocking the only line of railway to the Western Front now available south of the Ardennes, and the *Third, First, Seventh* and *Eighteenth* German Armies were virtually cut off. As no communication could be got with Berlin, O.H.L. had usurped the rights of the Government to accept the enemy's terms, and subsequently excusing itself on the ground that "it felt itself not only justified but bound to approve on its own initiative".

The second telegram, *en clair*, arrived at 10.30 p.m., signed "Reichskanzler". It authorized Erzberger to sign the terms of the Armistice as submitted, and simultaneously O.H.L. was informed that "the German army accepts the armistice terms "presented on the 8th November". (See Erzberger's "Erlebnisse"). Erzberger later wrote that the heads of the army were more than content with the terms obtained—which they did not mean to honour—General Gröner telling him that they "exceeded "the wildest expectations". If the terms had been refused, O.H.L. would have surrendered unconditionally. As long as it could avoid surrender in the field, it could pretend that the army had not been beaten.

Immediately after the Armistice the German General Staff officers who came in contact with British officers at Spa and in the bridgehead, one and all admitted that the German army had been beaten and could fight no more.

On the 21st November, Hindenburg telegraphed from O.H.L. to the German Government: "I must emphatically stress "(*nachdrücklich betonen*) that the German army . . . is not in a "state to resume hostilities. Even operations against the French "army alone would not be possible".[1]

Another factor came to light only in 1940, which may have influenced the High Command. In "Das Erdöl im Weltkrieg" (Petroleum in the World War), (see p. 402) it is stated that Germany's consumption of petrol, in thousands of tons, was in 1917, 1,410, and in 1918, 1,470; and that at the end of the war she had a balance of only 150, and her communications with the Rumanian oil-fields were threatened. Her retreating Armies on the Western Front in November 1918, visibly, had little petrol.

[1] Given in full in Purlitz "Von Waffenstillstand bis zum Frieden", p. 206.

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The distribution of the German divisions on the Western Front on the 11th November was as follows :—

	Miles	Divisions Front Line	Army Reserve	Total	German Armies
Vosges Front	10	16	—	16	*B* and *A Detachments* and part *Nineteenth*.
U.S. Front, Argonne	70	32	1	33	Part *Nineteenth, C Detachment, Fifth*.
Central Front (French Fourth, Fifth, Third and First Armies).	55	43	3	46	*Third, First, Seventh* and part *Eighteenth*.
British Front (five British Armies).	55	45	18	63	Part *Eighteenth, Second, Seventeenth, Sixth*.
Belgian Front (French Sixth Army and Belgian Army).	30	13	14	27	*Fourth*.
		149	36	185	
24th May 1918		119	89	208*	

* See "1918" Vol. III., p. 26. By November, 23 divisions had been broken up.

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CHAPTER XXXVI

Some Reflections on the Final Phase of the War[1]

On the 24th July 1918, at the final turn of the tide in favour of the Entente, Maréchal Foch in his instructions to the Allied commanders-in-chief aimed at " useful results " for the development of later operations and for the restoration of the economic life of France and Belgium. In particular, he hoped to free railways of vital importance for future manœuvre, to clear the northern coal mining area, and to drive the enemy from the neighbourhood of the ports of Calais and Dunkirk.[2] These aims accomplished, the Generalissimo in his Directive contemplated no more than " convergent attacks ".[3] He gave no indication that he thought the end was within sight.

Of old style strategy there was little sign either in the planning or the execution of this final stage of the war. The operations took the form of frontal pressure against the enemy line in every active sector, not a prolonged effort at penetration at one or more vital places; so that the Germans, on the run since the 8th August, Ludendorff's " black day ", although turned out of the strongest positions and generally hustled, were able to organize large-scale retirements in sufficient time to prevent any important detachment being cut off. We ourselves had escaped disaster of this kind by similar measures in March and April earlier in the year.

At the end of September the German front between the Moselle and the sea still presented a salient,[4] with its apex near Soissons, the southern face passing by Verdun and Reims, and the western face including la Fère, St. Quentin and Cambrai, and passing by Arras and Ypres. Theoretically the best place to make a decisive attack was on the

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[1] See Frontispiece.

[2] See " 1918 " Vol. III, p. 367.

[3] See pp. 232–3

[4] See End-paper B.

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eastern part of the southern face near Verdun. A successful advance there would interrupt one of the principal German railway lines of communication, Sedan–Mezières–Diedenhofen(Thionville), and imperil the supply of all the German Armies lying to the westward. If, however, a penetration was made east of the Meuse it would find the great permanently fortified area of Metz–Diedenhofen on its right flank. An advance west of the Meuse offered better prospects; but the ground in this sector was very broken, and included the Argonne, where for four years the Germans had been elaborating defences, while beyond it lay the Ardennes; and facing this difficult sector was the American army, the least experienced, in modern fighting, of the troops of the Associated Powers. In the result, whatever Maréchal Foch may have expected—on the 30th August he said to General Pershing: " the fate of the 1918 campaign will be decided " in the Aisne region "[1]—the initial progress in the Argonne sector was slow, and just as Mezières was reached the German army collapsed on account of happenings elsewhere.

It appears, however, that the Generalissimo never contemplated a break-through or a deep penetration from which an attempt could be made to envelop part of the enemy forces. The basis of his plan was a gradual widening of the front of battle so that the enemy forces would be stretched to the utmost and the line in consequence rendered so thin that it could not hold. One must imagine he also had attrition and the exhaustion of the enemy in view. General Weygand kindly communicated the following explanation:

> " Quant à la bataille de 1918, un mot seulement. Le
> " Maréchal n'a jamais cru à la possibilité d'une 'percée',
> " à effets décisifs, entre deux armées d'égale valeur
> " combative. En 1918 c'est la percée que Ludendorff
> " a cherchée en mars, en avril, en mai. Depuis long-
> " temps, au contraire, le Maréchal avait décidé lorsque
> " le moment de l'offensive viendrait *d'élargir la bataille*
> " *par les ailes*, dès qu'il sentirait qu'elle risquerait de
> " s'effiler en pointe et de s'enliser elle-même. C'est
> " ainsi qu'il a successivement élargi son front d'attaque–
> " d'abord les 21–23 août—puis les 26–28 septembre.
> " Tout cela était en principe arrêté dans son esprit et a

[1] Pershing, p. 568. The Aisne runs on the west side of the Argonne forest.

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" pu être mis en pratique à mesure que les circonstances
" s'y sont prêté ".[1]

As confirmation of this, it will be recalled that in the last days Maréchal Foch had ordered an extension of the front to the east by an offensive from Lorraine to be carried out by the French Eighth Army and newly re-formed Tenth Army, on the right of the Americans.[2]

It need not be emphasized that the Generalissimo was handicapped by the fact that his command consisted of four national contingents, each with its own lines of communication, and with different natures of armament, ammunition and rations, so that their formations were not homogeneous and interchangeable as were the German divisions. Attempts to mix the contingents had not turned out well. Maréchal Foch could not, therefore, except in a very limited degree, send to any sector the divisions best suited to fight in it. Nor could he—without the troops, the inhabitants and the enemy getting wind of the preparations—make a feint, say, with a French Army and then rush up French reinforcements to the British sector to make a decisive attack there. The change of British for French troops in the Nieuport sector in June 1917, and of French for British in the Kemmel sector in April 1918, had proved disastrous. The most

[1] A reader of the typescript having demanded a translation, it is here given :

" As regards the 1918 battle, one word only. The Maréchal never " believed in the possibility of a ' break-through ', with decisive results, " between two armies of equal fighting value. In 1918 Ludendorff, " in March, in April, in May, sought a break-through. Long before this, " the Maréchal, on the contrary, had decided that when the moment for " the offensive arrived, as soon as he felt the battle ran the risk of its " thrust dying down and of sticking fast [' diminishing force of the " offensive ' as strategists say], he would widen the front of attack on " both wings. Thus it was that he successively enlarged the front of " attacks—first on the 21st–23rd August and then on the 26th–28th " September. All this had been settled previously in principle in his " mind, and he was able to put it into practice as and when circumstances " permitted ".

[2] The date on which Maréchal Foch came to the conclusion that a break-through was impossible, is not stated. On 12th August he wanted to exploit the deep penetration made by the British Fourth Army and for it to continue its attack against strong resistance ; he seemed to oppose the extension of the attack to the left by the Third Army, as planned by Sir Douglas Haig (see " 1918 " Vol. IV, pp. 132–6 and pp. 168–9), and to mark his disapproval, withdrew the French First Army from the latter's command, a most unfortunate step, as General Debeney rarely tried to co-operate with the British in the subsequent operations.

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successful of the contingents, according to him,[1] the British, with its splendid Canadian and Australian corps, their divisions still twelve infantry battalions strong, was at the end of 1918 unstrategicly employed in a simple thrust eastwards.

There was no general reserve, although in January 1918 it was contemplated forming one of French, Italian and British troops to be at the disposal of the Versailles Supreme War Council. The commanders-in-chief had no surplus forces for such a purpose. The Italian Government were averse to any weakening of their front, and pointed out that they had already provided two divisions to serve in France ; General Pétain said he had no division to spare ; and Sir Douglas Haig replied that he was unable to comply with the suggestion of allotting six or seven divisions to the General Reserve.[2] Each contingent had its own reserves. In the case of the British these were small, and on the 26th September the Commander-in-Chief had nothing under his hand except three cavalry divisions (soon allotted to the Armies), the 25th Division (soon sent to the XIII Corps), the 39th Division (a training cadre), the 4th Australian Division (resting) and the Portuguese Corps (one division of which was sent to the Fifth Army). Even the two divisions originally held in reserve by each of the Armies were early handed over to the corps, so that they could be used to relieve divisions that had been too long in the fighting line. There were not enough divisions in the B.E.F. to retain any of them in true reserve to exploit a success.

In the final general advance on the enemy the subordinate leaders had little opportunity to obtain strategic advantages except by utilizing progress or success at one point as a means to outflank the enemy who was opposing their troops to the right and left of the break-in. Thus Sir Douglas Haig expected the advance of the Third Army south-eastwards in August would clear the Germans from the front of the Fourth Army ; the advance of the right wing of the First Army to the Sensée canal did facilitate the advance of the left wing (8th–19th October) ; General Plumer, overstepping the rôle of flank guard assigned to his Army by the staff of the G.A.F., sent the XV Corps over the Lys to

[1] See p. 233.

[2] See " 1918 " Vol. I, p. 68 and pp. 76–85.

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move down the valley and clear away the enemy holding the river line; the French First Army always waited until success of General Rawlinson on its left caused the retirement of the Germans on its front.

Of exploitation by mobile forces there could be no hope whilst the enemy still had machine guns to stop the cavalry, and scattered field guns to knock out the few slow-moving lightly armoured tanks of those days; yet there were occasions when even armoured cars, by pushing through, occasioned alarm and confusion.

The operations, as already pointed out, were of three kinds: the assault of well-prepared positions, the attack of field positions consisting of fortified localities and trenches, and the pursuit, by advanced guards, of Germans from one rear-guard position to another. In every case it was the enemy machine guns which, if they did not entirely stop, at least slowed up the advance. To the end the machine gun was the hard core of the resistance.

The British artillery throughout had the upper hand of the German batteries, whose fire, if not quickly subdued, was gradually lessened directly they disclosed their positions by fire. But the British gunners could not detect, or if they could detect could not smother, every scattered field gun and machine gun; nor could the creeping barrage ensure a shell being dropped on every enemy nest, many of which managed to escape destruction as it passed on. In spite of the barrage, whose main effect was to induce the enemy to take cover, such a large number of his machine guns remained untouched that, to escape their fire, nearly every assault and attack was made in the darkness or faint light before dawn. The defended villages and farms proved strong centres of resistance; they had no doubt been prepared at leisure—an insurance against penetration which the British, operating in a friendly country, had never been able to make; whereas the Germans carried it out as a matter of course wherever their troops were lodged.

Both attacks and assaults were usually covered by a creeping barrage, but rarely in this last period preceded by a bombardment. The counter-batteries dealt with the German artillery, and the long-range guns fired on special targets behind the front, such as road junctions, billets and suspected headquarters. Under the barrage the infantry went forward,

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not in the continuous lines and waves as at the Somme, but in large and small parties, down to platoon and section groups, in rough artillery formation, which followed up the bursting shells of the barrage. At first young troops were reluctant to believe that the nearer they kept to the line of falling shells, even at the risk of occasional shorts, the safer they were from enemy fire ; but it was a lesson quickly learnt. When the limit of range of the barrage was reached, the infantry generally stopped ; the artillery sent forward sections or single guns, sometimes 6-inch howitzers and 60-pdrs., to deal with centres of resistance, and this generally encouraged the infantry to go farther. The dangerous time as regards casualties arrived when the distant objective was reached ; the troops then frequently came under fire of the enemy's long-range heavy guns as well as field guns, and their own artillery was on the move or too far back to help them.

Very few officers and men who had received training in open warfare were in the field in 1918. The drafts consisted of very young officers and men who had had little useful training of any kind. The years of trench warfare, the necessary issue of lengthy orders entering into meticulous detail, and the rehearsal of attacks over a marked-out practice course with fairly well defined objectives, had produced an army which was prepared to stand enormous losses uncomplainingly, but was practically devoid of real tactical sense. The only tactical principle which was thoroughly ingrained, not only in the minds of the troops but even of the higher commanders—not excepting Maréchal Foch, who, as we have seen, was opposed to the creation of salients—was that of safeguarding the flanks. Perpetual fear of flank attack caused whole battalions to be wasted in watching the flanks of any division or brigade which got ahead of the general line. In a formal attack, however, it became the rule to mask and pass by defended localities, leaving them to be mopped up later. Otherwise there was a general disinclination to push on unless the flanks were deemed secure—a striking contrast to the behaviour of the Germans in their March offensive. No reason for extreme caution existed in October and November 1918 with the enemy on the run, when for him to indulge in local flank attacks, even if successful, would in the end have meant the capture or annihilation of the counter-attack troops.

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A young divisional commander said at the time that there was "still too much blue, red and green line"—that is fixed objectives—about the battles, and the infantry proceeded by bounds in spite of exhortation from some corps and divisional commanders to "go all out". In view of the imperfect tactical training of the regimental officers, even of most infantry brigadiers, the system of limited advance was inevitable; otherwise the troops would have fallen out of control. On the other hand, the patrol work of small parties, whether for reconnaissance, gaining ground or routing out enemy machine-gun nests, was magnificent; the use of ground, the value of the indirect approach and envelopment, were well understood. From lack of training and practice, however, great respect was paid to large woods, although they were comparatively easily cleared up by enterprising troops; in fact, the Germans, understanding the weakness of lines in them—supervision being difficult and artillery support out of the question—never in the later days attempted to make stands in them.

It should be noticed that frequently a fourth battalion from the reserve was attached to an attacking brigade: accustomed to four battalions, most brigadiers preferred this as a tactical unit to the three-battalion brigade introduced in January by orders from London.

River lines have in all wars proved a deception and of overrated value to those who sought to hold them.[1] To sit in position behind a water line is voluntarily to put a bandage on one's eyes. Covered by a river or canal, though it may be a valuable tank obstacle, an enemy can make his preparations unseen, is certain of surprise as regards time, and can make his crossing under a barrage at some, at least, of the places which he has selected, and then turn the rest of the line.

In the final stages, when the enemy was retiring rapidly, advanced guards of all arms, moving by the roads, were used to follow him up, and here small parties of cavalry and cyclists proved of value. They were generally able to discover in good time where the enemy was proposing to

[1] The crossing of the Crozat canal and the Somme by the Germans in the March offensive and of the Marne on 15th July 1918 against stronger opposition than that offered by them in September–November 1918 on the various rivers, not to mention the passage of the wider Meuse and Rhine in May 1940, shows that the power of crossing water lines is not confined to the British.

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stand, and thus prevented anything of the nature of fire-surprise, and gave the column warning that it must deploy. Owing to bad weather conditions in October and November, the air force could do little to help in this respect ; in fact, there is no record of aeroplanes being detailed to the columns for the purpose, although a few were employed to report to the corps headquarters the whereabouts of the leading troops and the position of the front line hour by hour.

In general, the work of the Royal Air Force consisted in bombing, without important results, railway junctions, cantonments, reserves and transport ; more usefully in reporting the massing of enemy reserves for counter-attack, the existence or the destruction of bridges, in ranging for the artillery, and occasionally machine-gunning enemy troops in action and on the march.

Whereas in trench warfare a central control of the machine guns of a division was found desirable, in open warfare the companies of a battalion were usually attached to brigades. In fact, the handling of a machine-gun battalion resembled more that of a brigade (present regiment) of artillery than that of an infantry battalion ; for any detachment, such as an advanced guard, required an allotment of machine guns.

Advances in the dark naturally handicapped the tanks, from which it was not easy to see very far even in daylight ; but as soon as it became light many fell victims to the enemy's forward guns. Their effect was largely moral. They were only used in small packets to assist the infantry, and did good service in crushing machine-gun posts and in village fighting. The infantry liked to see them, and as the enemy in his regimental histories has invariably exaggerated the numbers employed, and has often reported their presence when none were near, he evidently stood in fear of them.

In mobile warfare more initiative was required of all subordinate leaders than in position warfare, but from lack of training and experience, they far too frequently hesitated to act without orders. They were generally out of signal touch of superior headquarters, so that divisional commanders often went forward to nurse their infantry brigadiers and these in turn went forward to the battalion headquarters. Signal communication in the advance was a very different affair to the buried cables and telephone network of trench warfare. Divisions were usually connected to their corps by a single cable, though two were aimed at ; provision

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was, if possible, made in advance by running a cable forward from divisional headquarters to the place forecast as the next divisional headquarters. When a move of the fighting portion of divisional headquarters had to be made without cable communication, the administrative portion of the staff remained at wire-head. The artillery commander was usually at divisional headquarters and had a cable to some centre behind his batteries. Sometimes a cable communication was laid to infantry brigade headquarters; this was more usual at night, in fact some divisions made a rule of laying cables to brigades only at night when halted. Little use was made of visual signalling, and pigeons and dogs had been left behind. Telephones were rarely used ahead of brigade headquarters; the practice was dropped of signallers accompanying one of the leading waves of an attack with reels of telephone wire which they unrolled as they advanced; for the thin wire, and to a lesser degree cable, was all too frequently damaged by troops and transport passing over it, as well as by enemy shells, to make it sufficiently reliable. Usually a few motor cyclist despatch riders and mounted orderlies of the corps cavalry were allotted to the brigades in addition to their own signal section, and each battalion had its runners. Orders and messages were frequently delivered during the heat of battle by despatch riders (both motor and pedal cyclist), often at headquarters only traceable by dogged persistence. The time taken for orders to get through to battalions in the front line in open warfare was far too frequently underestimated at the higher headquarters.

Lateral communication, singularly liable to damage, was seldom attempted. That each division should be in connection with the division on its left was the accepted theory, but it was not always possible as cable became scarce. Wireless was sometimes used for lateral communication but, being liable to be read by the enemy and to reveal the position of headquarters and the call-signals, was avoided; despatch riders were considered the best means. Important information and operation orders were sent by hand, and carried either by officers in motor cars or motor cyclist despatch riders.

Map reading had been neglected during trench warfare, and the reports of junior officers as to where they were often proved unreliable. Although the country in the later stages of the advance was untouched by war, difficulty was

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experienced not only in the advances in the dark but also by daylight, in identifying objectives, and units frequently settled down some distance short of their destination, or, taking the wrong direction, overlapped another unit on one side and left a gap on the other.

In the final stage the rate of advance depended on the state of the roads and railways, and, of course, the bridges, not on the degree of enemy resistance, which was daily growing feebler. The main work of the divisional and corps engineers, with the auxiliary pioneer battalions, consisted of removing traps and hidden charges, repairing roads, bridging and installing water supply. The difficulties of repairing the railways to keep pace with the advance have been already pointed out.

Throughout the operations the evacuation of wounded from the forward areas was promptly carried out by the R.A.M.C. and unit stretcher-bearers, often in the face of enemy fire, and with long carries over heavy and water-logged ground.

Regimental officers were unanimous in reporting that the troops could not have carried through the tasks demanded of them had not the supply of rations—and full rations—been maintained under all conditions.

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CHAPTER XXXVII

RETROSPECT

Looking back on the four years of hostilities on the Western Front, it would seem the main interest which they now possess is no more than that they form the opening stage of a great phase of transition in land warfare. They exhibit not only the change from wars of manœuvre, conducted with professional armies of medium size, to a war of attrition with million-strong armies lined up without a gap, but they also show the change from wars of soldiery opposed to soldiery to wars of material. When belligerents are well-matched, *ebenbürtig*, as the Germans say, unless one of the two is able to bring off by surprise a decisive initial success, the struggle, as for instance in the American Civil War of 1861–5, is bound to be long and arduous. In our own case (except for the first four months during which our original expeditionary force of trained soldiers was practically wiped out by incessant fighting), 1914–18 was the struggle of a team of hastily gathered amateurs, who, guided only by a few professionals, had to learn by hard experience, against opponents who were a well-trained entirely professional team. In the nature of things, training during wartime is bound to be hasty and superficial, and the high standards of peace-time cannot be maintained; so the mass-produced German team deteriorated, gradually at first, and after Verdun and the Somme very rapidly. The native and innate military qualities of the British then prevailed over uninspired drill-made efficiency.

The outcome of the war led to the erroneous belief that, with the level reached by modern automatic weapons, the strength of the defence had outdistanced the former supremacy of attack, and that the defence, well-armed and lodged in well-prepared fortifications, would in future always be invincible.

The outcome of German post-war research into the operations of 1914–18 was: that battles of encirclement had only been successful in the stages of initial concentration, or in subordinate theatres against inferior forces. When the opposing Armies were largely *ebenbürtig*—or as Maréchal

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Foch said, " d'égale valeur combative "—two fortified fronts developed. There was no lack of attempts to bring about a decision by means of a break-through; but success by a battle of annihilation, that is the total destruction of the enemy in the field, was denied to both parties.

To analyze the main features of the great struggle: hostilities began with a short spell of open warfare, in which the Germans, by means of superior speed of mobilization and the treacherous invasion of a neutral country, seized the initiative and applying superior numbers at the decisive point, obtained a great initial advantage. This they lost at the Marne by the Allied counter-offensive. Unfortunately, after those many days of retreat and strain, the French and the six (including Allenby's cavalry) British divisions with them were too weak and tired to push the German hordes right out of France and Belgium. Numbers were lacking in the British case: the Territorial Army was not ready; the New Armies were still to be created. For two years, whilst British Armies were being raised, organized and trained, the German defensive had the advantage of the Allied offensives; for to make these successful neither artillery nor gun ammunition in sufficient quantity was available, and means, such as gas-shell and tanks, to smother the enemy's batteries and machine guns, were altogether lacking. The air force was not in a position to do much more than carry out valuable reconnaissances and photographic work.

The turning point—for the Germans " the culminating point " to use their own words, came in 1916. In that year casualties of well over a million were inflicted on their Armies: at Verdun, 426,519, and at the Somme 582,919—these are their own figures published after the war, the real totals were probably at least 30 per cent. higher, as the figures by their own admission " exclude wounded likely to rejoin the ranks within a reasonable time ". After every encounter the German propaganda service minimized losses on land and in the air, and magnified successes at sea—not without some result on the British public and its leaders. The Somme, according to German statements made after the War, " destroyed the best soldiers, the stoutest-hearted men: " their numbers were replaceable, their spiritual worth was " never recoverable ". Besides relieving Verdun, this long, drawn-out series of battles of the summer and autumn of

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1916, " was the muddy graveyard of the German field army, " and of the faith in the infallibility of the German leading ". The defeat at the Marne in 1914, at first sedulously concealed, but eventually publicly admitted, brought about the dismissal of the leader of the German hosts, Colonel-General von Moltke ; the defeat at the Somme occasioned the replacement of Moltke's successor, General von Falkenhayn, on the 29th August 1916, by Hindenburg–Ludendorff. This double-headed command was unwilling to continue the Somme struggle or to face another like it in 1917 ; but it could devise no remedy except a retreat to well-fortified lines out of immediate reach of their persistent foes. At this crisis the French politicians without any understanding of the War, gave the enemy opportunity to carry out his manœuvre. They dismissed their tried and successful commander, General Joffre, wrecking the unity of command which he, without protocol, by his personality alone, had established, and replaced him in the chief command by a theorist of persuasive words who, on the strength of a spectacular success at Verdun, gave promises of cheap, quick and easy victory. Whilst the new commander, discarding his predecessor's plans, was making preparations to employ his own methods, the enemy in February slipped back almost unhindered into his improvised fortifications. General Nivelle, by putting his theories into practice, ruined for a long time both the fighting power and the combative spirit of the French Army, and threw the burden of the war on the British. Had it not been for the British offensives in 1917, which forced Ludendorff to withdraw all reserves from the French front and concentrate his resources in Flanders, our Allies, with mutiny among the fighting troops and defeatism rampant behind the *zone des armées*, might well have been broken and a " Dunkirk " might well have ensued. Arras–Vimy–Messines, and the long drawn-out struggle July-November wrongly known as " Passchendaele " (the name belongs only to the period 12th October to 10th November) drew the best German divisions from the French front, more than fully engaged the enemy's attention, exhausted his reserves, and continued the disintegrating process of the Somme. The net loss of the German Armies in 1917, according to an official statement of Ludendorff, was 1,200,000 (" excluding wounded likely to rejoin the ranks within a reasonable time ") and this the recruit

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contingent, together with the recovered wounded, was insufficient to replace.

In 1918 the reinforcement of the German Armies in France by divisions from the Eastern Front, where the Russian Armies had ceased fighting, the drain on the British and French forces to help Italy after the collapse at Caporetto, and the denial of reinforcements to the British Armies in France, whilst at the same time an order for the extension of their front was enforced, reversed the favourable situation which had existed at the end of 1917. The German *riposte* to the great assaults of 1916 and 1917 was a heavy one ; a three-fold numerical superiority struck the weakest and only recently taken over sector of the British line. Yet in reality this so-called " peace offensive " was a gambler's throw made in the hopes of smashing the British before American help could be sufficiently developed. The Fifth Army first and then the Third Army were forced to swing back, pivoting on their left, the right thus moving westward away from their French neighbours. The legend that the British front was broken is a false one.

The German General Staff had previously put on paper : " It need not be anticipated that the French will run them- " selves off their legs and hurry at once to the help of their " Entente comrades ", and this turned out to be the case. Arrangements had been made for mutual and instant assistance ; but Haig was dependent on Pétain's charity, and as Sir Henry Wilson had warned the British commander-in-chief he found it " very cold charity ". Only a few French divisions in fact arrived, just in time to garnish thinly the daily lengthening gap between the two Allies. The great German thrust was finally held by the British in front of Amiens. Ludendorff then tried, with Hazebrouck instead of Amiens as the goal, an unrehearsed " second act ", with the same initial, but lack of final success. The one enduring result of the German offensive was that the Allies again obtained a united command, with General Foch to exercise it.

Henceforward, too, the American people in arms had to be reckoned with. Instead of a few reserve divisions insufficient in number to feed one limited battle, a large number of infantry became available for use at many places simultaneously. There was now no rest or respite for the enemy, and what counter-attack reserves he had ranged in depth were no more than enough to replace losses and to fill the gaps

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made in his front. The casualties of the German Armies on the Western Front in 1918, between the 21st March and the 1st October only, were 40,722 officers and 1,181,577 other ranks.[1]

Whether the pursuing Allied Armies could not have been handled more boldly and thrown in with better strategic direction to achieve a decisive result in the field has already been discussed at some length. The delay in staging a Lorraine offensive seems to have been due to the policy of leaving the fighting to the British and Americans.

The diminishing effort of the French Armies, so that on the 11th November they held only forty miles of the active front, has been noticed. On the other hand, the important share in the victory taken by the American Expeditionary Force after the German onslaughts in March and April 1918 has been insufficiently emphasized. The War Department in Washington had in the first instance sent over complete divisions, and intended to continue doing so. In the March crisis, in order to accelerate the arrival of American help, General Foch asked for infantrymen and machine-gunners to be sent over first. The Government of the United States agreed in principle, and despatched as many divisions as possible, their infantry and machine-gunners coming first, followed by the personnel of the artillery (which was to be armed in France), and other units.

The American numbers in France rose rapidly, the totals at the end of each month being :—

March 1918	318,621
April 1918	429,659
May 1918	651,284
June 1918	873,691
July 1918	1,169,062
August 1918	1,415,128[2]

During these six months no guns and no ammunition crossed the Atlantic, and only a few aircraft, 34 in July and 144 in August. By the end of November the total number of men sent over was 2,082,137.

Counting by divisions : on the 20th March there were six complete American divisions (with about double the infantry

[1] Kuhl, pp. 6 *et seq.*

[2] About 57 per cent. of the troops were carried in British ships (326 out of 621 vessels), but 95 per cent. of the stores (food, clothing, ordnance and engineer) in American bottoms.

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establishment of Allied divisions) and parts of three others in France ; by the 11th November there were 34 and parts of eight others.[1]

The German Great General Staff had made a fatal miscalculation, when they assumed that nothing would goad the U.S.A. into war, just as they imagined that the great Dominions would seize the opportunity to declare themselves independent.

Every war is full of surprises. A success gained in one war is not the recipe for victory in another ; the end of one war is no more than the jumping-off line for the mental and material preparations for the next. Soon after hostilities begin, as 1914–18 showed, new weapons and apparatus, even if in existence, only partially tried in peace-time, alter the details and even the nature of tactical operations ; changes are introduced and developments occur which tend to vitiate some of the text-book theories which obtained at the outset. For defence the German pre-war manuals laid down " one line and a strong one " ; defence in depth was considered a frittering away of fire power, although retrenchments and counter-attacks had long been included in the armoury of war. One of the best German fighting generals of 1870–1, however, when criticized some years after its close because the two divisions of his corps were training in different ways, said : " as long as the peace training is sound, " variations do not matter, for after the first battle we shall " do something quite different ". Field-Marshal Lord Wolseley once wrote on a War Office minute paper that we were too apt to found our training and equipment on the experience of our last war without looking forward to the requirements of the next.

Certain factors of success and failure had emerged in the great wars immediately preceding 1914. The Franco-German War of 1870–1 exhibited the dire consequences of unreadiness, the decisive effects of rapid mobilization, the

[1] Thus distributed :

American First and Second Armies	27
With the British (27th and 30th)	2
With the French	2
Lines of Communication	3
Arriving in France	1
Cadre	7
	42

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necessity of new tactics in the use of a new weapon (*mitrailleuse*), and the dependence upon railways of the huge armies of nations in arms.

The Russo-Turkish war of 1877–8 taught at least one useful lesson : the danger of a field army allowing itself to be hemmed in by taking refuge in a fortress.

The South African War of 1899–1902 showed the importance of entrenching in the attack and the value of heavy artillery in the field—and also, the enhanced value of mobility (in the form of mounted infantry). The Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5 brought prominently to notice the immense effect, both moral and material, of the machine gun and, incidentally, the usefulness of the trench mortar ; it exhibited the substitution on a wide front of a number of local reserves for a single general reserve.

The great lessons of 1914–18 are now universally known : the latent value, waiting to be developed, of the aeroplane, the tank, and wireless, and the supersession in battle of the horse by the mechanized vehicle. The accepted principles of strategy remain unchanged and hold good : such as " always mystify and mislead " ; " superior force at the decisive point " ; " make detachments as small as possible ". The details of tactics, of course, have altered, but not the principles (e.g., constant watchfulness, covering fire, speed of advance, use of cover, enfilade fire, depth in attack and in defence). Old methods of war were further developed : night attacks are as old at least as Gideon ; the pincer, or enveloping, attack is as old at least as Hannibal, and it was practised for centuries by semi-savages (the enveloping horns of the Zulu " impi ") ; operations against communications and bases were a feature of the campaigns of Napoleon and of the American Civil War. The use of large scale demolitions as a means of canalizing an attack and for gaining time were greatly developed. " Infiltration " and " Consolidation ", new words in the military vocabulary, became, in fact, of almost daily and nightly occurrence. Camouflage, already practised, without the name, in permanent fortification, became of vital importance in the field.

The narratives of each phase and battle of 1914–18 have been followed in the text by comments and reflections. The deductions to be drawn have passed from the domain of theory into that of hard reality ; so, in conclusion, " lest we forget ", only certain matters need be touched on.

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The British nation, and the great democracy of the west, the United States of America, after each of their many wars chose to regard its conclusion as the end of all war, and, with fear of the cost of large standing armies, had at its close proceeded to reduce their armies, sometimes to a strength even lower than that proved quite inadequate at the outbreak of war, and if not to turn their weapons into ploughshares, to sell or make away with a large proportion of them. The outbreak of every subsequent war therefore found both nations without the men and material which they should have known would be required, and they have had to improvise armies and manufacture their apparatus in haste. That the war of 1914–18 lasted so long was mainly due to the fact that the Germans gained an important initial advantage by getting their blow in first, thus gaining a strong foothold in Belgium and north-eastern France from which they had to be dislodged. For long the two sides were fairly evenly matched, neither having sufficient superiority either in men or material to break the long front and achieve a decisive success. The end was brought about as much by attrition as by tactical successes and by the exhaustion of one belligerent; a 3 to 1 numerical superiority was never attained and was not necessary to the Allies, because in the latter part of 1918 the German was no longer an "*ebenbürtiger Feind*": that is a foe equal in discipline and military virtues.

The cost of military unpreparedness was specially exhibited. The British nation relying on the Navy and clinging to an outworn policy, regardless of changes on the continent, had shut its eyes not only to history, but also to the lessons of major wars which should have been within public memory—the Crimea War and the S. African War of 1899–1902, to go back no farther—and refused to profit by the experiences of other nations. It was blind even to the lessons of our own small wars like the Zulu War of 1879 and of the Nile campaigns of 1885–98, and to the experiences of the United States of America, accounts of which were, of course, available in English.[1] Conscription in peace-time was doubtless impossible, but the apparatus needed to deal with million-strong armies might have been got ready. Not

[1] They were summed up in "Fighting Fools", by Br.-General J. E. Edmonds of the U.S. Army. For each of their many wars the United States were quite unprepared, got together an amateur army at great cost. and cut down the military forces and expenditure directly the war was over,

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only troops but the manufacture of arms and equipment also had to be improvised on a gigantic scale at tremendous cost in money—without counting the loss occasioned by the long period during which the trade of the country was dislocated. In the end victory was won, but at an expenditure of life and limb unavoidable in an amateur army of greater bravery than skill.

Whether if the British Empire had been prepared for war Germany would have ventured to open hostilities in 1914 must remain an open question. All that we know for certain is that the German General Staff looked on the small British Expeditionary Force with contempt; for when, for instance, the German Admiral Staff asked the Chief of the General Staff, General von Moltke, whether he wished the Navy to take steps to interfere with the transport of the Force to France, he replied, "No, it would even be an advantage if "the Armies in the West could settle with the 160,000 "English at the same time as the French and the Belgians".[1]

The provision of men and material will first be considered. The presence of five British divisions and a cavalry division on the western flank of the French Armies in August 1914 saved, but only just saved, the situation. Another five divisions would possibly have turned the scale decisively at the Battle of the Marne. Could half a dozen Territorial Force divisions have been landed at Calais and Boulogne in late August instead of only 4 battalions of Royal Marines,[2] the Race to the Sea might have ended very differently. Such a force would certainly have delayed, if not saved, the almost immediate loss of Antwerp and the Belgian Channel ports. But the Territorial Force divisions, by basic policy, required six months' training at home after declaration of war, did not expect to be required to serve abroad, their officers and n.c.os. were non-professional, and their armament was both obsolete and incomplete. Although four Territorial divisions were early sent as garrison troops to India and Egypt, and, by the middle of December 1914, 22 selected Territorial battalions and six Yeomanry regiments were in France attached to Regular units for training, no complete Territorial division landed in that

[1] The official "Der Krieg zur See 1914–18: Nord-See" i, p. 82.

[2] See "1914" Vol. I, p. 232. They landed at Ostend on 27th and 28th August 1914 and re-embarked on the 31st.

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country until the end of February 1915, that is seven months after the outbreak of war.

In August 1914, excluding overseas garrisons (from which, with the addition of supernumerary units, another five divisions and a cavalry division were improvised by the close of 1914) the British Army consisted of the Expeditionary Force of six divisions (one was retained in England until 7th September for defence purposes) and a cavalry division (5 brigades of cavalry in all), reckoned to number 180,000 men; depôts and reserve battalions, reckoned at 158,000 men; and the Home Defence Force, available for service in Great Britain only, of 14 Territorial Force Divisions and 14 Territorial Force Mounted Brigades, with a total establishment of about 320,000, but all below that establishment. In India were 9 divisions and 8 mounted brigades, totalling nearly 300,000 (one-third of the troops British), with depôts and garrisons numbering 110,000 men (nearly all Indian).

Of officers no reserve existed, except a small number in the "Reserve of Officers", mostly elderly, and on the "Special Reserve" list (a survival of the old Militia). These being judged inadequate in numbers to provide the officers required to mobilize six divisions, it had been arranged to promote two sergeants per battalion, etc., to officer rank to fill the gaps. The Officers' Training Corps (O.T.C.) of the universities and public schools were, however, able to produce a number of young men ready and fit to take Special Reserve commissions at once.

Canada, Australia and New Zealand possessed about 100,000 partially trained militia, available for Home Defence only. In Egypt, S. Africa and the Crown Colonies were 43,000 Regular and 10,000 local troops.

The large number of men necessarily engaged in shipbuilding, munition work and essential industries were not, of course, available as reinforcements;[1] but the total soldiers retained in the United Kingdom and Ireland seems always to have been unnecessarily large—e.g., on the 1st January 1918, 74,403 officers and 1,486,459 other ranks, not counting Dominion troops.[2]

In November 1918, excluding the United Kingdom and India, where there were respectively 4 and 3 Territorial

[1] The question of the distribution of man power is discussed in "1916" Vol. I, p. 50 *et seq.* and Appendix 7 of that volume.

[2] See "1918" Vol. I, p. 52.

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Force divisions, in the field were 80 divisions and 8 cavalry (or mounted) divisions, comprising 12 Regular divisions, 30 New Army, 21 Territorial Force, 1 Royal Naval, 10 Dominion (4 Canadian, 5 Australian and 1 New Zealand) and 6 Indian (2 in Egypt[1] and 4 in Mesopotamia), with 3 Regular cavalry divisions, 2 Dominion mounted divisions and 3 Indian cavalry divisions (2 in Egypt and 1 in Mesopotamia), and 51,000 men in East Africa (with imperfect divisional organization), North Russia and small defended stations abroad. The Expeditionary Force on the Western Front had risen from 6 divisions to 61 and from one cavalry division to three, and there were 19 divisions in Italy, Egypt, Salonika and Mesopotamia.

No fresh divisions were organized after the death of Field-Marshal Earl Kitchener, except, late in 1916, three Home Service divisions, subsequently disbanded, were formed from existing units.

The Territorial Force responded well to the call for foreign service: over 60 per cent. of the original officers and men volunteered at once, and most of the remainder followed their example in the course of time. Recruiting for Territorial Force units was brisk throughout, and all of the 14 divisions raised second-line divisions. The Government did not introduce compulsory service until the 27th January 1916, and meantime the pick of the youth of the Empire, who might be reckoned as potential officers, who had come forward voluntarily, had been killed or maimed serving in the ranks. Instead of using the County Associations and divisions of the Territorial Force to carry on the expansion of the land forces, Lord Kitchener, suddenly appointed Secretary of State in the War Office, an institution in which he had never served, chose in August 1914, to create "New Armies"—it is said that he regarded the Territorial Force in the light of the old unorganized Volunteers, companies of which he had known in S. Africa. He easily raised his "first hundred thousand," his second, and his third—K_1, K_2, K_3.

The new divisions were built up on extremely small nuclei: a few officers on leave from India and a few retired officers and ex-n.c.os., and without suitable manuals

[1] It should be remembered that in 1918 two Territorial Force divisions serving in Egypt had been partly reconstituted with Indian battalions, 18 British battalions being brought over to the Western Front

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of instructions.[1] How they were trained at first without arms and equipment has been related in earlier volumes.[2] As training for war had progressed greatly in the four or five years before the War, the tactical instruction in the United Kingdom carried out by re-called officers or N.C.Os. was largely out of date, and matters were not improved by devoting a large amount of time to trench warfare and the cult of " the bomb and the bayonet ".[3]

All the Dominion Imperial Forces were, like the Kitchener Armies, organized after the outbreak of War ; no attempt was made to build on the foundation of the existing local forces designed for Home Defence only. The first Canadian contingent, more than a division, reached the United Kingdom on the 14th October 1914 and France on the 15th February 1915. The first Australian contingent, consisting of one light horse brigade and one infantry division, and the first New Zealand contingent of 2,500 mounted troops, 5,000 infantry and a field artillery brigade, reached Egypt on the 3rd December 1914.

In spite of all handicaps, notably shortage of equipment, the first three New Army divisions arrived in France in May 1915, where the state of trench warfare fortunately gave time for gradual initiation into sedentary warfare, and occasionally offered opportunity for training in the tactics of open warfare. With a larger nucleus of up-to-date instructors, whom Sir John French, the Commander-in-Chief of the B.E.F., felt unable to spare from France, better results would have been obtained in a shorter time.[4]

Besides the divisions, Army troops and corps troops had to be raised, and officers and men provided for the new services of the Royal Flying Corps, later called the Royal

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[1] Major-General W. T. Bridges, the commander of the 1st Anzac Division, who was mortally wounded in Gallipoli, said at a pre-war conference in England that the British training manuals were "as much use to the Australians as the cuneiform inscriptions on a Babylonian brick ".

[2] See particularly " 1915 " Vol. II, p. 293, where the composition and training of the New Army 21st and 24th Divisions, which were thrust less than half-trained into the Battle of Loos, September 1915, is recorded.

[3] General Pershing noticed this mistake and insisted on the United States troops being trained first in field warfare.

[4] The new German divisions raised in August 1914 which fought at " First Ypres " three months later had a nucleus of about 22 per cent. of old hands. See *Army Quarterly* of January 1942, pp. 362–7.

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Air Force,[1] the Tank Corps, Tunnelling companies, besides Gas, Trench-Mortar, Anti-Aircraft, Searchlight and Camouflage units, and, eventually, " Transportation ", and for the immense apparatus of bases, hospitals, workshops, etc., on the Lines of Communication behind the fighting troops :[2] on the 5th January 1918 the total of fighting troops on the Western front was 1,097,906 (70,000 less than in January 1917), with 852,094 on the Lines of Communication, including 72,065 in Transportation, and the remainder in Labour units and other non-combatant services.[3]

Very many of the best officers (including 56 dead of the small number of fully trained staff officers) and n.c.os. were killed or disabled in the heavy fighting against the unshaken and usually three-fold more numerous German Army in the battles beginning at Mons and ending at " First Ypres " in 1914. A vast portion also of the trained men who knew how to shoot, and whose " rapid fire " at Ypres was mistaken by the Germans for machine-gun fire, became casualties, and their place was taken by partially trained reservists and old soldiers over 50 years of age who had not fired a shot since the S. African War. The early summer of 1915, when the infantry of the original B.E.F. had practically ceased to exist and the Territorial Force and New Army divisions were only just beginning to arrive, and munitions were short, was probably the most dangerous period of the war.[4] The trained officers were irreplaceable. As the old Dowager Empress of China said truly in 1900, officers cannot be improvised. Many of the original regimental officers of the New Armies had no training at all as such. Courses of instruction, all too short, were gradually introduced, and behind the line in France schools of all kinds were organized.

The selection of commanders and staff officers presented special difficulties : an elderly officer who had experience of General Staff methods and " Q " routine and administration, might be more useful, in spite of physical drawbacks, than a

[1] It started with a total of 6 squadrons, which had increased by 11th November 1918 to 271, of which 99, with 1,799 machines, were on the Western Front.

[2] These are described in " 1916 " Vol. I, pp. 57–154.

[3] See " 1918 " Vol. I, Appendix 7.

[4] Up to 30th November 1914 the total casualties of the B.E.F. amounted to 3,627 officers and 86,237 other ranks, the greater part of this loss falling on the infantry of the first seven divisions, which originally numbered only about 84,000.

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younger man who had only theoretical knowledge of the art of war. Actually commands were sometimes given to officers who had been passed over for promotion in peace time. To fill the ever-increasing number of staff appointments good regimental officers, to the detriment of their units, were taken; the system of "learners" was introduced, and in the winters short Staff College courses were held. During the war the staff officer produced was not, however, an all-round man, but trained only in one particular branch, or merely in one side of it. Even the few commanders and staff officers who were fully trained had no experience of a force of more than a division, and they found the handling of corps and Armies a novelty, even without the added new condition that they had to deal with improvised bodies of intelligent amateurs, not the fully trained professional teams of the Old Army. Orders had to contain more details, and subordinates required more nursing and supervision; for initiative was uncommon in the new regimental officer and little was done by subordinates without definite instructions. The officers and n.c.os. of the Old Army, pitiably small in numbers after the early battles, got little credit from the Nation for having completed the training of the Territorials; for having "pounded" within the space of a few months "an awkward, shy, self-conscious mob" of civilians[1] into a fairly manoeuvrable military force; for providing the staffs to manoeuvre and supply far larger bodies of men, more than ten times the strength of the original 6-division B.E.F., and many times larger than they had been allowed to contemplate even in Staff College "schemes"; and for organizing an incomparable Intelligence service.

Military talent is rare and is not immediately evident. Seniority rules bar its ascent. Napoleon as a young man said to Talma the actor: "You have only to go on the "stage and your genius is recognized. I may remain unknown "for ever". And, alas, some of the brightest officers, from whom much was expected, were killed in the first few weeks. That time was available for any training at all was due to the fact that in the winter of 1914–15 the German High Command turned its attention from France to Russia, so that it was possible to shake down in some degree; and from the date of the Battles of the Somme 1916 the German army

[1] "The First Hundred Thousand", by Ian Hay.

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deteriorated both in staff work and combat skill a great deal faster than did the new British army from the zenith of quality which it had reached on the 1st July 1916.

From first to last the British Expeditionary Force, as in earlier wars, never had enough troops, or labour, for the task required of it. As soon as additional divisions arrived in France, the British were required to take over more of the line. The most flagrant example of this was in January 1918, when, by the decision of the Supreme War Council, over twenty miles of frontage, very indifferently prepared for defence, had to be taken over from the French by the Fifth Army (General Sir H. Gough),[1] and this shortly after General Plumer (Second Army) with five divisions had been sent to Italy. Yet the Government, in spite of the protests of the Commander-in-Chief and the Army Council, refused reinforcements to bring units up to strength, and, in order to fill the ranks of a proportion of them, ordered the reduction of the number of infantry battalions in a division from twelve to nine.

Thus, except at Loos, when Sir John French had the newly-formed Guards Division and two half-trained New Army divisions fresh from England in reserve, the British Commander-in-Chief in France never had a reserve at his disposal. The few divisions not in the line were either resting or in reserve to Armies. On the fateful 21st March 1918, the so-called G.H.Q. reserve consisted of no more than eight divisions, placed locally two and two behind each of the four remaining Armies, whose own forces in reserve totalled no more than five divisions and one cavalry division.

In the old days in the attack on a fortress it was the normal procedure to make both subsidiary and feint attacks at the same time as the assault on the main breach which as often as not failed. The small number of divisions, with heavy artillery in direct proportion to this weakness, in comparison with the frontage to be held—for instance in March 1918, the Fifth Army had on the average 6,555 yards per division, with a total of 515 heavy guns, one per 36 yards, and the Third Army, 4,900 yards, with a total of 461 guns, one per 30 yards[2]—made it impossible to do much in the way of such diversion attacks; for these cannot be organized with any

[1] See " 1918 " Vol. I, Sketch B.

[2] See " 1918 " Vol. I, pp. 126–32 and 254–6.

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hopes of success without a great display of artillery. It is tantalizing to think what might have happened if after the bombardment at the Somme in 1916 the attack against Messines (actually carried out in 1917) could have been made; or if the Somme assault had taken place after the great Messines bombardment. But even then the British would not have had sufficient troops to exploit a great success; they never had enough for a counter-offensive, hardly enough for local counter-attack. We must rest content that we did put into and maintain in the field in France 61 divisions and gradually, with some American assistance, wore down the enemy.

In June 1916, as soon as the Ministry of Munitions was prepared to receive new orders, those given in July 1915 being nearly completed, Sir Douglas Haig submitted a new programme, stating the organization that he was going to adopt of light, medium and heavy artillery. Neither this proposed organization nor his demands were subsequently altered. The original Expeditionary Force went into the field with 486 guns and howitzers, of which only 24 were of medium calibre, none heavy. On the day of the Armistice there were 6,437 guns and howitzers (exclusive of anti-aircraft artillery and trench mortars) with the Armies in France, of which no fewer than 2,211 were medium and heavy. The demands of the Commander-in-Chief, however, were never fully met, and until 1918 he was unable to demonstrate with artillery at several places along the line, in order to deceive the enemy as to his real point of attack, or to counter-battery the German artillery to the extent that he desired.

Shortage of ammunition was severely felt, not only in the early days, but also in the Battles of the Somme and during the winter of 1916–17.[1] Severe restrictions had to be placed on its expenditure in the summer of 1917. In August 1917, during the early stages of " Third Ypres ", the expenditure of howitzer ammunition had to be limited; but shortage of guns, owing to demands not being met and to battle casualties, reduced the call on 18-pdr., 60-pdr. and 6-inch ammunition. In the winter of 1917 ammunition was again short; but by August 1918 all that was required, except 6-inch howitzer shells, was forthcoming. Even before that

[1] There were plenty of shells; it was the high-explosive filling and the fuzes for them which were deficient.

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date Ludendorff had complained in an Army Order that the British artillery had destroyed per month no less than 13 per cent. of the German artillery opposing it; and the great battle of the 8th August was marked by even more remarkable counter-battery work. Thenceforward the superiority of the British artillery, which had begun to show when on anything like equal numerical terms with the enemy in the spring of 1917, became permanent. Had it not been for the shortage of material this superiority could have been attained earlier.

As regards machine guns in 1914, the British and German establishments were the same: the former was two guns per battalion, and the latter a company of six guns per regiment of three battalions; but each such German company possessed one spare gun, the British battalion had none to replace casualties. In 1918 a British division of nine infantry battalions and a machine-gun battalion had an establishment of 64 Vickers machine guns and 336 Lewis. The Germans in October 1916 increased the number of machine-gun companies to one per battalion, and gradually raised a number of independent machine-gun battalions; by the end of 1917, after which no change was made, each regiment (3 battalions) was possessed of 36 heavy and 72 light machine guns, or a total of 324 per division, against the British 400; but the Lewis gun was inferior in fire power to the German light weapon. In addition, however, the Germans organized at least 80 machine-gun marksmen detachments, 111 light machine-gun detachments, and 19 motor-cycle machine-gun companies, and the British had in 1918 three motor machine-gun brigades and eight Army troops machine-gun battalions. In the end the disparity was not great, but the Germans had developed the arm more quickly.

In 1914 the British had no trench mortars; a proposal, made in 1906 after the Russo–Japanese War, to devise a "bombard" to support infantry was turned down. Until the introduction of the Stokes mortar at the end of 1915, they had nothing but locally improvised weapons of various patterns. By 1918 each division had 24 Stokes and 12 medium (2-inch) mortars, and a few 9·45-inch heavy were available. The enemy entered the War with both light and medium *Minenwerfer* and soon added to them a heavy pattern.

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The story of hand grenades is much the same as that of the trench mortars: the Germans in 1914 already had the "stick grenade" in the service—it was shown at siege manœuvres in 1908. Until the first supply of Mills bombs arrived in July 1915, the British had to depend entirely on improvised grenades.

The cost[1] in combatants' lives (killed in action, died of wounds, died as prisoner of war, and missing whose deaths were presumed), was finally found to be 996,230 (including Royal Navy 33,361 and R.A.F. 6,166); the wounded amounted to over two million (but no less than 64 per cent. "returned to duty in front line", and a further 18 per cent. "returned to duty on L. of C., garrison, or sedentary occupation")[2] and with other casualties totalled 2,289,860 (Royal Navy, 6,405 and R.A.F. 10,457).

The deaths were thus distributed:—

British Isles (Army only)	704,803[3]
Dominion of Canada	56,639[4]
Commonwealth of Australia	59,330[5]
Dominion of New Zealand	16,302
Union of South Africa	6,606
Newfoundland	1,204
Colonies	49,763
India	62,056

Next after the Western Front, with 560,000 killed and died of disease, Gallipoli was the most deadly campaign, with 26,213.[6]

The enemy's losses were considerably heavier. During the war he did his utmost not only to mislead his foes, but also to conceal the truth from his own people. His casualties at Verdun, for instance, once vaunted as a quarter of those of the French, are now admitted to have been about the

[1] According to the Central Statistical Office, Cabinet Office.

[2] Official History of the Medical Services, "Casualties and Medical "Statistics," p. 20. Eight per cent. only of the wounded were discharged as "invalids", 7 per cent. died; of the remaining 3 per cent., the "disposal "otherwise is not stated".

[3] Officers, 38,834; other ranks, 665,969.

[4] Officers, 2,887; other ranks, 53,752.

[5] Officers, 2,862; other ranks, 56,468. According to A.O.A. Vol. VI.

[6] The Statistical volume of the Official Medical History, p. 108, gives the total dead on the Western Front as 564,715: battle casualties, 381,261; died of wounds, 151,356; died of disease or injury, 32,098.

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same; similarly, for the Somme, during which battle he endeavoured to persuade the world that his casualties were almost negligible, it is now certain that he lost about 600,000, that is the total of the British and French combined; even popular German accounts admit to half a million.[1] Statistical investigation has shown that his official total of two million dead must be very nearly doubled.

On the 17th September, six weeks after the outbreak of war, Lord Kitchener told the House of Lords that "our "chief difficulty is one of material rather than of personnel". On taking up his appointment at the War Office he had not concealed his dissatisfaction at the preparations which had been made.[2] There was not a sufficient reserve of arms and munitions to equip fully the authorized Territorial Force; the reserve of gun ammunition held for the six Regular divisions was considerably less than what had been asked for by the General Staff; the Treasury and "its outposts "in the War Office", as a Secretary of State, Mr. Duff Cooper, called the Finance Branch of the War Office, had declined to face the expenditure involved by the increase of gun ammunition and of the additional transport required to carry it.

It was the business of the Master-General of the Ordnance to ascertain what the General Staff required and devise the best patterns, but not to order the purchase or manufacture even if such action was approved by the Secretary of State. That was the prerogative of the civilian "Contracts Branch" under the Financial Secretary. But, although this cumbrous system obtained officially until the 19th January 1915, the Master-General of the Ordnance, knowing the delays of the peace procedure, and in order to save a breakdown, at once set about ordering munitions and equipment.[3] Only the

[1] See "1916" Vol. I, pp. 496–7.

[2] The story of "Munitions" is told shortly in "1914" Vol. II, pp. 11–19, and "1915" Vol. I, pp. 37–49. Some facts and figures now given were not available until evidence was taken by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Private Manufacture of and Trade in Arms in 1935.

[3] As an instance of delay, the M.G.O. ordered the first sixteen 9·2-inch howitzers on 4th September 1914, but the contract was not signed until 7th October. Instead of ordering gun ammunition, the Director of Army Contracts invited 14 firms to tender.

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Royal Ordnance factories and the "armament firms" were in a position to produce the major varieties of munitions. The Government factories comprised only Woolwich Arsenal (where guns were made), the gunpowder factory at Waltham Abbey and the small-arms factory at Enfield Lock; and after the S. African War the staffs of these establishments had been cut down and reduced to about one-half.

The principal firms which manufactured arms and ammunition[1] were four: Armstrong-Whitworth, Beardmore, Coventry Ordnance Works and Vickers.[2] In the five years preceding the War about one-third of the orders for the minute requirements of the Army had been given to these and smaller firms, and they had not been asked to contemplate expansion. To keep their workers employed the armament firms had been forced to seek for foreign orders, and some of them to turn to the manufacture of bicycles, motor cars, sewing machines and other articles in civil demand. On the other hand, the Admiralty relied chiefly upon the great armament firms not only for ship building, but equally also for armaments.

When, therefore, the War Office in August 1914 called upon the private firms to supply munitions, and soon after Lord Kitchener announced his scheme for increasing the army from seven to seventy divisions, enormously adding to the quantities required, many of the firms were found engaged on large orders for the Navy. In order to deal with the new demands, they had to put up buildings, obtain and erect machinery; and both expansion and output were handicapped by the absence of many of their skilled men, now in the armed forces. To ease the situation, the War Office, after forming an Armaments Output Committee, placed orders in Canada and the U.S.A. Full permission was given to the private firms to place sub-contracts for component parts with non-armament firms. Thus by

[1] Full information with regard to the "armament firms" will be found in the Report of the Royal Commission of Enquiry into the Private Manufacture of and Trade in Arms, 1935.

[2] In addition, the Birmingham Metal & Munitions Company, Cammell-Laird, Firth, Harper, Hadfields and the Projectile Company, were manufacturing gun ammunition; the Birmingham Small Arms Company, and London Small Arms Company, made small arms; the Birmingham Metal & Munitions Company, Eley Brothers, Greenwood & Batley, the King's Norton Metal Company, and Kynochs, made small-arm ammunition; and British Explosives, Chilworth Cotton, Curtis & Harvey, National Explosives, New Explosives and Nobel's, manufactured explosives.

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October 1914 some 2,500 to 3,000 firms were involved in the production of munitions, but many of them had no previous experience in that particular work. The Royal Ordnance factories, themselves expanding, could spare no experts for the guidance and superintendence of the beginners; the armament firms, however, really in similar straits, managed to do so. In the result, owing to the shortage of skilled labour, to delays in the delivery of machinery, to difficulties in the provision of gauges, as the number of craftsmen making them was limited and the demand enormous, and owing to trade union restrictions, the private firms were unable to deliver the quantities ordered to time. Lord Kitchener stated in the House of Lords on the 15th March 1915, " notwithstanding their efforts to meet our require-
" ments, we have unfortunately found that the output is
" not only not equal to our necessities, but does not fulfil our
" expectation ", and he added, " the supply of war material
" at the present moment, and for the next two or three
" months, is causing me very serious anxiety ". It was this failure to deliver to time which led, on the 2nd July 1915, to the formation of the Ministry of Munitions, followed on the 15th of that month by the passing of the National Registration Act. The new Ministry took over the whole War Office apparatus for the supply of arms, including inspection, with its Armaments Output Committee, and set about the construction of additional, National, factories. But without the armament firms, according to the evidence of the Director of Artillery, there would, in the early days of the War, have been " an almost negligible supply for some
" months ". The records of the Ministry of Munitions state clearly: " The fact remains that the armament firms alone
" were at the outbreak of war the only firms with actual
" experience of munitions manufacture. Ordinary engineer-
" ing firms could not take up such work at a moment's
" notice when there was little or no organization at head-
" quarters for instructing and supervising them; and it
" was to a great extent the education in shell making which
" such firms received as sub-contractors to the armament
" firms which enabled them in the summer of 1915 to organize
" their own resources on a wider and more independent basis ".
By the end of the War about fourteen thousand firms were engaged on munitions. Of the grand total of 28,557 guns supplied to the Army, 25,513 were manufactured by the

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armament firms in the United Kingdom, 1,406 in the U.S.A. and 1,638 by Woolwich Arsenal; the non-armament firms and improvised National factories produced only the smaller articles and shells. Until early April 1916, however, not a single complete round made and filled under the orders of the new Ministry was delivered—the supply came on the previous War Office orders—and during 1916, on the Ministry's first orders, the gun ammunition and many other articles proved unsatisfactory owing to demands for huge quantities which looked well in statistics, to the hurried improvisation of plant and workers, to the shortage of machine tools, and particularly to the lack of competent inspectors. What was written in "1916" Volume I, p. 122, and confirmed in "The History of the Ordnance Service", iii, pp. 138 *et seq.*, sums up the trouble.

> "Had the quality of the ammunition been good, "the quantity might have sufficed; but at some time "or other during 1916 many types of munitions were "under suspicion for some flaw, or under repair or "reconditioning for some ascertained defect; indeed, "there is general agreement that the quality both of "guns and ammunition was much below that of those "used at the Battle of Loos (September 1915). Thus "throughout 1916 there was a steady increase in the "number of prematures in proportion to the number of "rounds fired".

From 1917 onwards, that is after the War had been in progress more than 2½ years, the new system was in full swing and, in spite of the demands of the Navy (during the War 1,040 war vessels were built, 991 by private yards), of the Air Force (of the output of 55,093 machines, only 1,302 were manufactured by the Royal Aircraft Factories and the 3 National aircraft factories), and of the Tank Corps and other new formations, and in spite of the assistance given to Allies and the heavy losses of material in March and April 1918, the army had nearly all, except heavy guns, that it required, often more ammunition than could be got up to the front.

For the extraordinary expansion and output the credit must go to the armament firms. That in the beginning there was some failure was due to lack of encouragement in peace-time and neglect of any warning that the firms might be required to expand.

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In the end the men were obtained and the material was created. Was the best use made of them? What happened in France in 1940 seems to provide exclusive proof that the Western Front was, at any rate in the first instance, the decisive one. Had not the B.E.F. appeared in August 1914, France would have been beaten "according to plan" in the first six weeks. Later, lack of ships and the U-Boat menace made unfeasible any large-scale operation elsewhere than in France and Italy; bad railway communication with Italy stood in the way, however, of large British or French contingents being sent there by land and the mountainous nature of the Austro–Italian frontier and the country beyond it put decisive operations in that theatre out of the question. Gallipoli had the all-important purpose of opening communication with the Russians and was worth trying, the Turks were an obstacle not an objective. It failed because in early 1915—when the condition of the B.E.F. was at its worst—the Empire had not sufficient military resources to carry on two campaigns simultaneously. Salonika (a French substitute for Gallipoli), Mesopotamia and East Africa were wasteful sideshows, which absorbed very little German effort and a great deal of British manpower and material, besides shipping. The Turks being miserably weak and ill-provided in Palestine, a campaign in the Holy Land on account of its world moral effect was on the whole profitable. In the end, in 1918, troops had to be brought back to the main theatre, France, from both Salonika and Palestine.

The strategy on the Western Front was in the hands of the French; the two British Commanders-in-Chief had very limited freedom. Once the front was stabilized, both Sir John French and Sir Douglas Haig saw that success in Flanders, where the left would be guarded by neutral Dutch territory, offered a good opportunity of cutting off part of the German line—and perhaps rolling the rest up—without creating a salient. This idea did not appeal to the various French commanders, neither to Joffre, Nivelle or Pétain, nor to Foch. Strategically, the right flank, the Sedan-Verdun sector, as already pointed out, offered the best results; but the ground (the Argonne with the Ardennes behind it), presented grave difficulties. In 1915 Joffre,

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with a perfectly sound plan, attacked both sides of the enemy salient in France in the hope of cutting off the Germans in it; but the defence was too strong. In 1916 he selected the Somme area without any strategic idea, for the sole reason that the British and French would attack alongside each other.[1] Nivelle in 1917 expected to achieve a triumph by mere brute force, and assigned only a subsidiary rôle to the British. After his failure Sir Douglas Haig was forced to try his Flanders plan. It opened well at Messines; but the almost complete quiescence of the French, now under Pétain, enabled the enemy to concentrate large forces against the British, and when success after Broodseinde was very near, not only bad weather but the diversion of divisions to Italy also foiled and weakened the attackers. Cambrai seems to have been fought in order to close the year with a marked success of some kind.

Co-ordination of effort had been established by General Joffre. When he was shelved and General Nivelle had lamentably failed not only to achieve success but to ensure willing obedience even from the French generals, the conduct of the war was gradually taken over by the politicians and, to ensure political supremacy, the Versailles Supreme War Council was devised. But instead of deciding on a policy and leaving this to the generals to transform into plans, the Council attempted to prepare plans of their own. Had a Supreme War Council, suitably organized, been brought into being earlier, continuous direction of effort might perhaps have emerged instead of spasmodic interference. It is noticeable that on both sides the conduct of the war on sea and the war on land, even by the Allies at the Dardanelles, was carried on in separate compartments.

After General Pétain was given command of the French Armies on the 15th May 1917, our Allies did very little. In early 1918 his insistence that the British should take over more of the line, and his slowness in moving French troops, despite a pre-arranged scheme, to the assistance of the British, combined with other factors, very nearly brought about disaster, but it led to Foch, a fighter, being appointed Generalissimo. Political control of operations through the Versailles Supreme War Council at once lapsed. Foch, a writer on strategy, aimed at material results rather than

[1] See " 1916 " Vol. i, pp. 25 *et seq.*

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battles of annihilation : the freeing of essential communications and the interruption of the enemy's channels of supply. This he accomplished not by manoeuvre but by hard fighting, not by using superior force at a decisive point, but by engaging the enemy everywhere, so that the Germans dare not concentrate their heavy reserves, as they had done, notably in 1917, on one particular front, and were forced to use them piecemeal. Whatever Foch may have intended, the result was attrition pure and simple. As the British in the left centre made the best progress, they involuntarily became the spearhead of the attacks. When the general offensive was launched at the end of September, the extreme wings, which should have pressed on, for different reasons made slower advances than the British—in the Argonne the strength of the defences and difficulties of the ground, in Flanders the breakdown of the supply system held up the attacks.

Once a continuous line from Switzerland to the sea had been formed, there was " no way round ", and a hole had to be punched in the enemy's front line before any manoeuvre could be attempted. As Ludendorff said with regard to March 1918, " tactics came before strategy ".

Within the limits imposed on him, Haig, wherever he attacked : at the Somme, at Arras, at " Third Ypres," at Amiens (8th August 1918) and in the Battles of the Hindenburg Line (September 1918), always aimed at some sort of surprise, and planned that the break-in at one part of the line should be used for outflanking effect to clear the front of an adjoining sector and provide an opportunity for the use of cavalry—" the gee in Gap ", as the Army was pleased to call it. At the Somme, for instance, after the first success (eastwards), the object was " to turn northward, taking the " enemy's lines in flank and reverse, the bulk of the cavalry " operating on the outer flank of the movement ".[1]

The Old Army had been superlatively well trained in open warfare,[2] but the subject of the attack and occupation of fortified positions had been neglected, and even after two years of warfare no pronouncement on it had been made by

[1] " 1916 " Vol. I, p. 266.

[2] Instruction had failed in one particular. In order that Germany should not be irritated, by War Office order, no instruction was given about the German Army and its methods, and the British officer, unlike his enemy, had not been given opportunity to visit possible future theatres of war, or even to study the maps of them.

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the General Staff. The tactics of breaking into a position were discussed at length with regard to the Battles of the Somme 1916.[1] Those used in the first great attempt of the 1st July were gradually improved upon. The mistake made was the regarding of the assault of a strong fortified line as the climax of the infantry attack in open warfare, after fire superiority had been obtained and the attackers had fought their way to within assaulting distance. The assault with the bayonet was then to be carried out at the highest possible speed. None of the assumed conditions obtained. The date and hour of assault were arbitrarily fixed by the French Commander-in-Chief; fire superiority had not by any means been gained; the width of No Man's Land, in places five hundred yards, was too great; and the shell-pocked ground, enemy wire, and the load carried by the troops reduced their speed to a steady walk. Too little attention was paid by the General Staff to the advice of the artillery and engineer experts, who, recalling the methods of fortress warfare, suggested the concentration of artillery fire on particular sectors rather than spreading it nearly evenly, and advocated the pushing forward by " parallels " to within real assaulting distance;[2] but a few divisional commanders did this, with excellent results.[3] Except at Messines the advice of tunnelling experts was not acted upon, and mining was not brought into the framework of the tactical schemes.[4]

It is not fair to judge the employment of tanks on our present knowledge. In 1916–18 they were experimental weapons, and their best employment, especially in co-operation with other arms, could not be ascertained except

[1] " 1916 " Vol I, pp. 484 *et seq.*

[2] Both British Commanders-in-Chief were cavalrymen. They each in the first instance had an infantry officer as Chief of the General Staff, whom they replaced by a cavalryman, so that in 1915 and 1918 both Commander-in-Chief and G.C.S. were cavalrymen. Further, two of the five Army commanders, Generals Byng (who succeeded Allenby, another cavalryman, in the Third Army) and Gough (who was superseded in the Fifth Army by another cavalryman, Birdwood) were cavalrymen. In all, of the nine generals who commanded Armies, five were cavalrymen, three infantrymen, and one was a gunner. What the Army called the " cavalry spirit ", led to pressure for haste and to expectation of gain of ground incompatible with siege warfare in the field by men who had to struggle over shell-pocked ground and through deep mud.

[3] For instance, Major-General Hull (56th Division), using three thousand men, dug a trench 350 yards nearer the enemy, with a communication trench, for the Battle of the Somme, though warned of the " serious risk " involved ". " 1916 " Vol. I, p. 457.

[4] See 1916 Vol. I, p. 430.

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by trial and error. The first of these " creatures " were cumbrous, slow-moving, poorly armed and armoured, and they frequently broke down in consequence of mechanical defects. The sacrifice of a priceless opportunity for a great surprise in their first employment, by divulging their existence when only a few were available, has been fully discussed.[1] Contrary to the wishes of Lieut.-Colonel (later Major-General Sir) E. D. Swinton, who was, as the Germans say, " the father of tanks ", and of the experts of the Tank Corps, the machines were engaged, except at Cambrai, in " small packets ", and often on ground and in a state of light unsuited to them. Many officers regarded crushing down wire as their chief rôle, and in any case they were treated in the days of a continuous front as an auxiliary weapon. No real opportunity for their decisive use could occur until a break-through had been achieved, and by the time the Germans were on the run in October 1918 few tanks were left to take advantage of the situation.

The introduction of the creeping barrage ; the paralysing of the enemy artillery by gas shell bombardments ;[2] the improvement in wire-cutting methods ; the appearance of tanks ; the opening of unregistered but calculated artillery fire at Zero instead of a preliminary bombardment of many days' duration ; the substitution of small parties in rough " artillery formation " for lines and waves, and of a number of limited objectives for distant and unlimited ones (except in pursuit) ; and the frequent use of night and dawn attacks,[3] coupled with the deterioration of the German fighting spirit, gradually led to the offensive getting the better of the defensive. The answer, however, to these improved means,

[1] " 1916 " Vol. II, pp. 364–8. In the first use of poison cloud gas by the Germans at Ypres on 22nd April 1915, the Germans made a similar error.

[2] The Germans used lacrymatory gas shell from April 1915 to July 1916, but on 19 May 1916 introduced lethal gas shell at Verdun.

Sir John French in June 1915 asked for supplies of shell filled with lacrymatory gas, but it was not till the autumn of 1916 that any considerable quantity of these was furnished. They were first fired by the British on 12th September 1916. In January 1916 Sir Douglas Haig asked to be supplied with shells with lethal gas filling ; but it was some time before the Cabinet could bring themselves to permit their use, and it was not till the Battle of Arras in May 1917 that any considerable quantity was available.

Gas achieved but local success, nothing decisive ; it made war uncomfortable, to no purpose. It was not used in 1939–45.

[3] The French set great value upon good daylight observation for the artillery, so their infantry seldom attacked at dawn. This made co-operation at the international junction somewhat difficult.

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which was the defence in depth instead of " a single line and a " strong one " (the theory of the pre-war German textbooks), presented new problems and gave the attackers no easy task.

In the early days of the War, the British, on the defensive at the battles of Mons, le Cateau, La Bassée, Messines and " First Ypres ", held their position, without any reserves to speak of, by sheer effective rifle shooting straight to the front, the few machine guns being used for flanking purposes. As a result of these successes, and because everybody from the Commander-in-Chief downwards expected to be going forward very soon, little attention was given to the study of defence in the three years which followed, except to reconnoitre and mark a few back lines and to prepare some inundations. When, in the winter of 1917–18, it became necessary to issue instructions on the subject, the General Staff judged they could not do better than reproduce the theory evolved by the Germans,[1] and promulgated by them on the 15th August 1917, after three years of defensive warfare. Their later elaboration of the system of zones and " elastic yielding " was unnoticed or still unknown. In the new German conception rigidity was to disappear; the " Outpost Zone " and the " Battle Zone " were to be held by invisible garrisons in shell-hole positions; these were to be supported by fire to stop the attacker's onslaught, first from the artillery and then from rows of hidden machine guns; large defended localities were superseded by smaller " nests " —the " hedgehogs " of a later date; great freedom in the conduct of the fight was allowed to the local commanders, and it was on their call that the all-important *Eingreif* divisions entered the battle—from the reserve, truly, yet closely interlocked into the scheme of the forward divisions, not as counter-attack troops at the disposal of the higher commanders. And, above all, greater depth was in theory given to defensive positions.

By the new British instructions, early in 1918 the new nomenclature of " Forward Zone ", " Battle Zone " and " Rear Zone " were given to the existing system of " Front Position ", " Corps Line " and " Army Line ". There was short time and little labour to elaborate these lines into deep positions. As it happened, by far the best defence in March–April 1918 was put up by the 55th (1st West Lancashire)

[1] See " 1918 " Vol. I, p. 41 and footnote 4.

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Division, whose commander, Major-General Sir Hugh Jeudwine, ignoring the zone conception, had pinned his faith on an outpost line and a " Line of Resistance ", to be recovered by immediate counter-attack if lost.[1] Gough's defence failed because the greater part of his line, recently taken over from the French, was insufficiently organized (there was no Third Line or Rear Zone at all); because depth was lacking; because the troops available to hold the long front were insufficient; and because the reserves of the Fifth Army and its four corps were far too small to meet a really heavy attack. Later, in April, in spite of the collapse of the tired Portuguese Corps, the First and Second Armies put up a better fight than the Fifth Army had done; but it was the timely arrival in Flanders of Australian and French reinforcements which caused Ludendorff to stop the battle. In the last months of the War the latest and most perfect German theory of defence, backed by all the best weapons of the period except tanks, had to yield to the attacks of the soldiers of the Empire. In 1918 at any rate the German fighter was inferior to the British both in defence and in attack.

French and British tactical doctrines differed throughout. At first our Allies, trusting to the wonderful tactical sense of the French soldier, left everything to the *élan* of their infantry. After the general initial failure they completely changed round, and in the attacks in 1915 relied on the artillery to prepare the way, so that " the infantry would only have to " walk over and take possession ". The British, on the other hand, at all times sought co-operation of the two arms. In a defensive attitude the French expected the artillery to keep the enemy off, and for this reason were uneasy when covered by British guns. They occupied forward slopes, the British preferred reverse slopes, so at the junctions of their fronts both Allies arranged for their own flank protection. The pace of the two barrages never agreed, not only on account of the difference between a hundred metres and a hundred yards, but because the French rate of advance after the barrage lifted was slower. The French favoured

[1] See " 1918 " Vol. II, pp. 160–1, 175–6, 188. This system was recommended as best suiting the British by a committee of three officers specially assembled at G.H.Q., Major-General (the late Lieut.-General Sir Hugh) Jeudwine, Br.-General (now General Sir Norman) McMullen, and the compiler; but their draft report was rejected by the General Staff in favour of the German conception as then known.

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long bombardments, whilst Sir Douglas Haig was always in favour of short ones ; they always insisted on a preliminary bombardment, which we eventually abandoned altogether. Further, as already noted, they liked a late start in broad daylight, and we almost systematically took to before-dawn advances. To give another example of the marked difference of ideas, a French colonel said that in his army the laying of the artillery cables came first, whilst the British set about digging latrines. The difficulties of the interchange of troops and collaboration may be imagined.

Misdirected training at home and lack of opportunity for training in France seriously handicapped the troops of the new divisions in 1916–17. They learnt readily enough both in the great retreat of March–April 1918 and in the offensives of August–November 1918. They soon picked up the tricks of the trade, they quickly noted and absorbed the tactical lessons, and they fought better as the days passed, whereas the Germans fought worse. But they had never received the musketry training of the Old Army, and, in consequence of too much stress having been laid in their early instruction on the bomb and the bayonet, they never placed the reliance on the rifle which the men of 1914 had done, and they left covering fire too much to the machine gun and the field gun. In the end, however, it was not the weapons or the tactics but the superiority of the British soldier over the German on the ground, under the ground and in the air which won the day ; the numerical superiority by which the Germans won their successes was never vouchsafed to the British.

Sir Douglas Haig has been accused of persisting in offensives at the Somme and " Third Ypres " after they ceased to offer any prospect of decisive success and in spite of bad weather. His reasons are discussed in detail in the volumes dealing with those battles, and it is shown that in the former battle he was acting in loyal acceptance of General Joffre's policy of harrying the sorely battered enemy ; the Frenchman has even stated that Sir Douglas Haig broke off the battle of the Somme too soon, and that victory could have been won if the British had persisted. Haig himself would have preferred to stop his Somme offensive after the first phase and, as soon as his heavy artillery could be moved, to carry out the " Messines " of June 1917, the mounting of which, except for guns, was complete and ready.

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Those who have read the "Third Ypres" volume will have realized the very strong pressure to continue the struggle brought to bear upon the British Commander-in-Chief not only by General Pétain, but also by the British Admiralty. By nature, Sir Douglas Haig, once he had "got his teeth in" was not disposed to let go, and he was informed by his Intelligence Branch that the Germans were suffering more than his own men, whilst the British public and others were inclined to believe German propaganda lies as regards the respective casualties. It has already been pointed out that we now know from enemy sources that the Somme was the graveyard of the old German army, that "Third Ypres" fatally dislocated the reinforcement programme, and that the German Crown Prince, who wished to exploit his victory over General Nivelle, was unable to do so on account of lack of troops—all available divisions having been sent to Flanders to meet the British attack, so that he was left with barely enough men to hold his line defensively. Those who want victories without bloodshed usually get heavy casualties without victories. The public were misled into thinking that bad weather persisted throughout the "Third Ypres" fighting; heavy rain at times did interfere with progress, but it was not until the 12th October that rain turned the ground into a morass which made the supply of gun ammunition, except near the roads, impossible. Any who doubt this should read the Australian Official History,[1] wherein it appears that the Australians regarded the conditions at the close of the Battles of the Somme as worse than at "Third Ypres" where they were employed in the last stages, and it is judged that, after the Second Army's successes of the 20th–25th September, 26th September–3rd October and of the 4th October, Sir Douglas Haig was justified in continuing the battle. Then, however, came, as Crown Prince Rupprecht, his opponent, has written under date of the 12th October: "Change of weather. Fortunately rain, our "[Germany's] most effective ally", which he had not previously mentioned.

The policy of making the division, not the corps th
tical unit, except in the case of the Canadian an
Corps which insisted on their divisions bei
has been touched on.[2] It certainly ea

[1] The essential paragraphs are quoted in
[2] See p. 179.

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General Staff at G.H.Q., and was supposed to keep the divisions alert by the more frequent moves it entailed. The Germans, after a time, did the same; but in the end they decided that this was a mistake; because, although it might be possible to discover fifty or more good generals to command corps, to find over two hundred good divisional generals was not to be expected. The French tried to keep in a corps its original two divisions with a varying number of other divisions in addition.

The necessity for constant raids was a moot point. A few were naturally required to take prisoners for "identifications". They were supposed to keep up the fighting spirit of the troops—the French, by inaction in the winter of 1917–18, as Maréchal Foch recognised, suffered evident deterioration. Raids led to the loss of many first-class officers and men, and to retaliation, which meant more casualties. Probably very small lightning raids to obtain prisoners and large raids, the Australian policy, for some definite purpose, would have been better than raiding for the sake of raiding.

The wonderful success in the field of the Intelligence Branch of the General Staff has been mentioned from time to time. Its superiority to the German is beyond question: it has been regretfully admitted by the head of the German *Nachrichten Bureau*[1] both as regards obtaining information and preventing opponents from getting it. After peace his successors made every effort to ascertain how our system was worked, and in particular to discover how "I" learnt of the presence and line of march of the new Reserve divisions which made their first appearance at Ypres in October 1914. The story of the secret propaganda carried out behind the German lines, which was begun as early as September 1914, for which the open propaganda later devised on by other agencies served as valuable cam[illegible] cann[illegible] told. The officers [illegible] achievements.

Luck
war

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chance ", and Rühle von Lilienstein (1780–1846), who wrote " war is a mixture of art and luck ", were inclined to regard it as a very prominent factor. Clausewitz has written that " war is the province of uncertainty and of chance " ; that it is " like a game of cards . . . with good and bad luck. . . . " Along with chance the accidental, and, along with it, " good luck, occupy a great place in war ". (*Vom Kriege*, pp. 10 and 25).

On the whole, the enemy had slightly the best of the luck. Rain wrecked both the Somme and " Third Ypres." The fog on the 21st March 1918 was offset by that of the 8th August ; but the British had nothing to balance the fortuitous arrival of a relieving division from Russia on the eve of the Battle of Cambrai 1917 ; or the accident that the division on which the tank attack fell was the only German one specially trained, on the initiative of its commander, to fight tanks ; or that the German offensive of the 21st March 1918, without premeditation, struck the weakest part of the British line. On the other hand, the British did have the luck that Moltke and his staff lost their nerve at the Battle of the Marne 1914, and that Ludendorff failed to realize the true situation on the 29th April 1918, and stopped the offensive when he had practically pierced the British lines near Hazebrouck.[1]

The age for the retirement of commanders has been a matter of debate. Age is biological and should not be reckoned by the calendar. Each case should be judged for itself. Field-Marshal Earl Haig at the end of the War was 56 and lived only ten years more ; Lieut.-General Sir James Grierson, commander of the II Corps and the most successful general at peace manœuvres, who died in the train in August 1914 soon after landing in France, was only 55. Field-Marshal Lord Plumer, when he took command of the Second Army in 1915, was 58 and he lived another 18 years. When Sir Hubert Gough was given command of the Fifth Army in 1916 he was 46. The other four Army commanders were in 1918 aged 57, 56, 54 and 53 (Sir William Birdwood). There is no secret as to the order of merit in which the men in France regarded the Army commanders.

The corps commanders in 1918 were much of an age (53 to 57), but there was a considerable difference in the age

[1] See " 1918 " Vol. II, pp. 453–4.

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of the divisional commanders (36 to 56), the average being 47·7 years, and the two oldest, the late Lieut.-General Sir Hugh Jeudwine (1862–1943) and the late Major-General Sir Lothian Nicholson (1865–1933), had more notable successes in the last year of the War than the younger ones; the youngest, a temporary major-general, was eventually passed over for substantive promotion to that rank.[1] Age matters more with regimental officers than with other categories: in 1917 an order was issued that no one over the age of 35 should be given command of a battalion, but after the peace, 56 again became the limit. Here again activity is the criterion; in 1914 some lieutenant-colonels could be seen running forward with the best of the athletes; others collapsed because they were worn out by marching a few miles, not being able to ride their horses in battle, and two were tried by court martial for dereliction of duty, when bodily fatigue with consequent mental break-down was their offence.

Two questions have often been asked: "were the Allies "wise from the point of view of their communications in "agreeing to an armistice?"; and "could their Armies have advanced in sufficient force to overcome opposition?"[2] Three principal factors militated against a rapid advance in force: damage to railways, roads and bridges, which takes time to repair; air attacks on junctions and railheads; and the explosion of delay-action mines. Although the "head of steel" (that is, the furthest point to which a railway was usable) kept pace fairly well with the advance, attacks

[1] Robert E. Lee was 55 when he defeated McClellan, aged 35, and saved Richmond in 1862.

On the enemy's side, that Blücher was 70 at Waterloo, Moltke 70 at Gravelotte and Hindenburg 70 at the Somme 1916, has been frequently quoted. Rank for rank, both the German and French generals were older men than the British Although many successful generals of the past were young men, the average span of life was shorter, and most of them were dead before reaching the middle age of to-day. Napoleon died at 52, the age at which Marlborough began his triumphs. Turenne never showed quite to as much advantage as in his last campaign (1674–1675) when he was 62.

[2] Details of the rail and road situation will be found in the official "Transportation", p. 460 *et seq.* "Transporting the A.E.F. in Western Europe", by W. J. Wilgus, Deputy Director-General of Transportation of the American Expeditionary Force, and the French official "La Direction de "l'Arrière" and F.O.A. vii (ii).

The general question "Pouvait-on signer l'Armistice à Berlin?", is discussed in General Mordacq's book with that title.

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from the air delayed the arrival of trains and made railheads temporarily unusable, so that a large proportion of the traffic had necessarily to be unloaded at stations (former railheads) far behind the front, and the explosion of mines frequently blocked traffic for considerable periods. On the 11th November, though the railway was through to within thirty miles of the front, the only reliable railheads for the Fourth Army were 50 miles behind the Armistice Line. The other four British Armies, with railway lines respectively through Solesmes, Valenciennes, Tournai and Courtrai available, were not so badly off, and had railheads twenty to thirty miles back. Had the roads been in good condition, the distance to be run by motor lorries from the railheads would not have been prohibitive: not only, however, were the roads in bad repair—they had also in places been systematically broken up; in the Fourth Army area the filling of mine craters in the roads, from lack of material, was said to be unable to keep pace with the advance,[1] and shortly before the Armistice horse transport from the ammunition columns was being used to carry loads to the troops. The irregular arrival of the trains at railheads, and night running over bad roads led to such abnormal wear and tear and damage to lorries, that the field workshops got behind with the repairs. Thus it was the state of the roads which as much as anything hampered the British advance. Our Allies, who used a lighter lorry (about 3 tons as against 5), had less trouble; in fact, the French official account says little about transport difficulties, and General Pershing and the official "American Armies and Battlefields in Europe", nothing: the American problem was not so much at the front as on the lines of communication.[2]

To sum up, it was no longer possible to advance at full strength, but it was quite possible to do so in sufficient strength to pursue a beaten and demoralized enemy who had revolution in his Homeland, the Americans threatening his southern line of communications at Mezières, an attack imminent in Lorraine against his most vital flank, and an Italian inroad into Bavaria, via the Trentino, quite possible since Austria-Hungary had collapsed. Winter was certainly

[1] In the pursuit of the Germans in 1917 the débris of the houses they had demolished provided road material.

[2] See "Transporting the A.E.F. in Western Europe" by W. J. Wilgus, mentioned above.

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coming on, but the roads through the Ardennes, the Condroz and the Hesbaye were not likely to be blocked with snow before January. After the Armistice two of the five British Armies, the Second and Fourth, with 32 divisions out of the total 61, and the whole Cavalry Corps advanced to the German frontier, and eleven divisions and one cavalry division went on to the Rhine, and all did so on full rations, unlike Lord Roberts's troops in the march on Bloemfontein in the South African winter of 1900, who received no more than quarter rations. Besides this feat of organization, the Quartermaster-General's staff fed the civil population of the occupied territories and supplied it with coal, and many trains were run for its convenience. Against opposition the advance would have been slower and the road transport therefore would not have been so severely strained. It was policy, not military difficulties (which do not seem to have been considered by any of the Governments concerned—or by the German leaders in their many debates on the question of asking for a stay of hostilities), which led to the granting of the Armistice.

How badly the German army was broken, and how necessary it was for its leaders to seek an armistice to prevent complete collapse, will have been realized from the Notes at the end of certain of the chapters of this volume, founded on German documents, particularly that at the end of Chapter XXI, where a translation of a letter written on the 18th October by Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria to Prince Max of Baden is printed: the commander of the northernmost of the Groups of Armies in his conclusions informed the Chancellor that " I do not believe there is any possibility " of holding out over December ". On the 21st November, after his troops had enjoyed ten days' rest from battle and had a sleep, of which they stood in such urgent need, Field-Marshal von Hindenburg telegraphed from Great Headquarters to the German Government: " I must emphasize " strongly that the German Army is not in a position to " resume fighting. Even a fight against the French Army " alone would not be possible ".

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APPENDIX I

APPENDIX I

SKELETON ORDER OF BATTLE OF THE BRITISH ARMIES IN FRANCE, 27TH SEPTEMBER 1918

(WITH SUBSEQUENT CHANGES)

First Army (General Sir Henry Horne)[1]

VIII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Aylmer Hunter-Weston)
- 8th Division
- 20th Division
- 24th Division (To Third Army 30.9).
- 49th Division[2] (to XXII Corps, 10.10)
  - 12th Division (from Fourth Army, 4.10)
  - 52nd Division (from Third Army, 10.10)
  - 58th Division (from Fourth Army, 30.9; to Fifth Army, 14.10)

XXII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Alexander Godley)
- 4th Division (with Canadian Corps from 27.9 to 7.10)
- 51st Division
- 56th Division (to Canadian Corps, 11.10)
  - 11th Division (from Canadian Corps, 13.10)
  - 49th Division (from VIII Corps, 10.10)

Canadian Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Arthur Currie)
- 1st Canadian Division (reserve to XXII Corps from 7.10)
- 2nd Canadian Division
- 3rd Canadian Division
- 4th Canadian Division
- 11th Division (to XXII Corps, 13.10)
  - 56th Division (from XXII Corps, 11.10)

Second Army (General Sir Herbert Plumer)

II Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Claud Jacob)
- 9th Division
- 29th Division (to X Corps, 25.10)
- 36th Division (to X Corps, 31.10)
  - 31st Division (from XV Corps, 25.10; to XIX Corps, 2.11)
  - 34th Division (from X Corps, 28.10)

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[1] The names of the chief officers of each Army and corps are given in footnotes in the text on the first mention of their formation.

[2] Held in G.H.Q. reserve.

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Second Army (General Sir Herbert Plumer)—*contd.*

X Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Richard Stephens)
30th Division
34th Division (to II Corps, 28.10)
36th Division (from II Corps, 1.11 ; to XV Corps, 9.11)
29th Division (from II Corps, 25.10)

XV Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Beauvoir de Lisle)
14th Division
31st Division (to II Corps, 25.10)
40th Division
36th Division (from X Corps, 9.11)

XIX Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Herbert Watts)
35th Division
41st Division
31st Division (from II Corps, 3.11)

Third Army (General Hon Sir Julian Byng)

IV Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Montague Harper)
5th Division
37th Division
42nd Division
New Zealand Division

V Corps (Lieut.-General C. D. Shute)
17th Division
21st Division
33rd Division
38th Division

VI Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Aylmer Haldane)
Guards Division
2nd Division
3rd Division
62nd Division

XVII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Charles Fergusson, Bt.)
52nd Division (to First Army, 10.10)
57th Division (to Fifth Army, 11.10)
63rd Division
19th Division (from Fifth Army, 4.10)
24th Division (from First Army, 6.10)
61st Division (from Fifth Army, 8.10)

Fourth Army (General Sir Henry Rawlinson, Bt.)

III Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Richard Butler). Transferred to Fifth Army, 8th October.
12th Division (to First Army, 4.10)
18th Division (to XIII Corps, 1.10)
58th Division (to First Army, 30.9)
74th Division (to Fifth Army, 2.10)

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Fourth Army (General Sir Henry Rawlinson, Bt.)—*contd.*

IX Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Walter Braithwaite)
- 1st Division
- 6th Division
- 32nd Division
- 46th Division

XIII Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Thomas Morland)
- 25th Division
- 50th Division
- 66th Division
- 18th Division (from III Corps, 1.10)

Australian Corps (Lieut.-General Sir John Monash)
- 1st Australian Division (in rest camp)
- 2nd Australian Division
- 3rd Australian Division
- 5th Australian Division
- 27th American Division
- 30th American Division

Fifth Army (General Sir William Birdwood)

I Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Arthur Holland)
- 15th Division
- 16th Division
- 55th Division (to III Corps, 8.10)
- 58th Division (from First Army, 14.10)

XI Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Richard Haking)
- 19th Division (to Third Army, 4.10)
- 59th Division
- 61st Division (to Third Army, 5.10)
- 47th Division (to III Corps, 13.10)
- 74th Division (from Fourth Army, 2.10; to III Corps, 8.10)
- 57th Division (from Third Army, 11.10)

III Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Richard Butler). Transferred from Fourth Army, 8th October.
- 55th Division (from I Corps, 8.10)
- 74th Division (from XI Corps, 8.10)
- 47th Division (from XI Corps, 13.10)

Reserves:
- 39th Division (cadre)
- 4th Australian Division
- 1st Cavalry Division
- 2nd Cavalry Division
- 3rd Cavalry Division

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APPENDIX II

ARMY TROOPS[1]

First Army

Artillery :

Heavy Batteries : 20 (6-gun) = 120 60-pdr. guns

Brigades R.G.A. : Mobile, 6; Mixed, 4; Army, 2; 8-inch, 6; 9·2-inch 6, = 24 Brigades + 20 Siege Batteries unbrigaded.

Siege Batteries :

	Batteries	Guns	
6-inch how. ..	58	310	
6-inch gun ..	8	32	
8-inch how. ..	10	60	
9·2-inch how. ..	10	52	
9·2-inch gun ..	3	6	
12-inch how. ..	6½	10	
12-inch gun ..	1	2	
14-inch gun ..	½	1	
15-inch how. ..	1	1	(No. 8 R.M.A. Bde.)
	98	474	

Total : 118 batteries : 594 heavy and siege guns and howitzers.

Anti-Aircraft :

20 sections of 13-pdr. guns and 4 sections of 3-inch guns = 48 guns.

Field Artillery Brigades	18
Engineers :	
Special Projector Companies	6
Mortar Corps	1
Army Troops Companies	10
Siege Company	1
Tunnelling Companies	4
Electrical and Mechanical Company	1
Boring Section (for water)	1
Army Workshop Company	1
Field Survey Battalion :	
Sound Ranging Sections	5
Observation Groups	5

[1] Engineers, Signal Service, etc., are given for the First Army only; their allotment to the other Armies was similar.

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First Army—contd.

Engineers—*contd.*	
A.A. Searchlight Sections	10
A.A. Searchlight Company	1
Pontoon Park	1
Advanced R.E. Parks	2
Transportation (Works) Company	1
Tank Corps Battalion	1
Signal Service:	
Cable Sections	2
Air Line Sections	3
Light Railway Signal Company	1
Signal Construction Company	1
Area Signal Detachments	7
Pigeon Service:	
Mobile Lofts (1 motor)	14
Fixed lofts	12
Infantry:	
Battalions	3
Machine-Gun Battalions	4
Military Police:	
Traffic Control units:	
Company	1
Squadron	1
Army Service Corps:	
Pontoon Park (M.T.)	1
Army Troops M.T. Company	1
Auxiliary (Petrol) Company	1
Mobile Repair unit (M.T.)	1
Workshop for A.A. guns	1
Water Tank Company	1
Medical:	
Motor Ambulance convoys	4
Casualty Clearing Stations	12
Advanced Medical Stores Depots	3
Mobile Laboratories	4
Mobile X-Ray Units	2
Mobile Dental Unit	1
Stationary Hospital	1
Sanitary Sections	12
Sanitary Squads	5
Veterinary:	
Evacuating Stations	3

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First Army—contd.

Ordnance :

Mobile Workshops (heavy, medium, light) ..	3
Gun Park	1
Officers' Clothing Depot	1
Forestry Units	
Companies	2
Labour Corps :	
Companies	31
Area Employment Companies	12
Area Employment (artisan) Companies ..	2
Chinese companies	14
Army Printing and Stationery Services :	
Advanced Photographic Section	1

Second Army

Artillery :

Heavy Batteries : 16 (6-gun)= 96, 60-pdr. guns

Brigades R.G.A. : Mobile, 3 ; Mixed, 5 ; 8-inch, 3 ; 9·2-inch 4 ; Army, 2.
=17 brigades + 16½ batteries unbrigaded and the Bermuda Contingent R.G.A.

Siege Batteries :

	Batteries	Guns	
6-inch how. ..	36	198	
6-inch gun ..	7	28	
8-inch how. ..	8	48	
9·2-inch how. ..	9	52	
9·2-inch gun ..	1½	3	
12-inch how. ..	9	18	
15-inch how. ..	1	1	(No. 4 H.H. Bde. R.M.A.)
	71½	348	

Total : 87½ heavy and siege batteries : 444 heavy guns and howitzers

Anti-Aircraft :

18 sections of 13-pdr. guns and 6 sections of 3-inch guns= 48 guns

Field Artillery Brigades : 8

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Third Army

Artillery :

Heavy Batteries : 16 (6-gun) : 96, 60-pdr. guns

Brigades R.G.A. : Mobile, 4 ; Mixed, 3 ; 8-inch, 3 ; 9·2-inch, 5 ; Army, 3, = 18 Brigades + 19 batteries unbrigaded

Siege Batteries :

	Batteries	Guns	
6-inch how. ..	37	190	
6-inch gun ..	9	36	
8-inch how. ..	6	36	
9·2-inch how. ..	8	48	
9·2-inch gun ..	2	4	
12-inch how. ..	6	11	
12-inch gun ..	½	1	
14-inch gun ..	½	1	
15-inch how. ..	2	2	(Nos. 3 and 10 H.H. Bdes. R.M.A.)
	71	329	

Total = 87 heavy and siege batteries : 425 heavy guns and howitzers

Anti-Aircraft :

19 sections of 13-pdr. guns and 1 section of 3-inch guns = 40 guns

Tanks : Battalions, 3

Fourth Army

Artillery :

Heavy Batteries : 20 (6-gun)—120, 60-pdr. guns.

Brigades R.G.A. : Mobile, 4 ; Mixed, 6 ; 8-inch, 7 ; 9·2-inch, 3 ; Army, 1

21 brigades + 16 batteries unbrigaded

Siege Batteries :

	Batteries	Guns	
6-inch how. ..	50	258	
6-inch gun ..	9	36	
8-inch how. ..	13	78	
9·2-inch how. ..	9	52	
12-inch how. ..	5	10	
14-inch gun ..	1	2	
15-inch how. ..	1	1	(No. 1 H.H. Bde. R.M.A.)
	88	437	

Total : 108 heavy and siege batteries : 557 heavy guns and howitzers

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Fourth Army—contd.

Artillery—*contd.*

Anti-Aircraft :

10 sections of 13-pdr. and 3 sections of 3-inch guns = 44 guns

Field Artillery Brigades, 10

Tanks : Battalions, 11
Armoured Car Battalion, 1

Fifth Army

Artillery :

Heavy Batteries : 4 (6-gun) : 24, 60-pdr. guns.

Brigades R.G.A. : Mobile, 1 ; Mixed, 1 ; 8-inch, 2 ; 9·2-inch, 2 ; Army, 2.

8 brigades + 13 batteries unbrigaded

Siege Batteries :

	Batteries	Guns	
6-inch how. ..	17	98	
6-inch gun ..	3	12	
8-inch how. ..	2	18	
9·2-inch how. ..	3	14	
9·2-inch gun ..	1½	3	
12-inch how. ..	6½	13	
15-inch how. ..	1	1	(No. 2 H.H. Bde. R.M.A.)
	34	159	

Total : 38 heavy and siege batteries : 183 heavy guns and howitzers.

Anti-Aircraft :

13 sections of 13-pdr. and 2 sections of 3-inch guns = 30 guns

Field Artillery Brigades, 3

APPENDIX III

ORDER OF BATTLE OF A CORPS

Headquarters
Corps Cavalry
Headquarters Corps Heavy Artillery

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Heavy Trench Mortar Battery R.G.A.[1]
Cyclist Battalion
Sharpshooters Group
Corps Signal Troops:
    Corps Signal Company
    Air-Line Sections, Motor, 2
    Cable Sections, 2[2]
Corps M.T. Column:
    Corps Troops M.T. Co.
    Divisional M.T. Companies, 4[3]
Heavy Artillery A.S.C. Company
Medium Ordnance Mobile Workshop[4]
Light Ordnance Mobile Workshop, 5[5]
Area Employment Company[6]

APPENDIX IV

ORDER OF BATTLE OF A DIVISION

Headquarters
Infantry Brigades, 3
    each of 3 battalions[7]
1 T.M. Battalion
Artillery Brigades, 2
    Each of 3 18-pdr. and 1 4·5-inch howitzer batteries
Trench Mortar Batteries, R.A. 2[8]
Ammunition Column
Field Companies, R.E., 3[9]
Signal Company
Pioneer Battalion
Machine Gun Battalion
Divisional Train (4 companies A.S.C.)
Field Ambulances, 3
Mobile Veterinary Section
Employment Company.

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[1] The Canadian Corps had no heavy T.M. Battery, but each Canadian division had one.
[2] The Canadian Corps had 4 cable sections.
[3] The Canadian Corps had 5 companies; the Australian Corps, 7.
[4] The Canadian Corps had 2; the Australian Corps, 3.
[5] The Canadian Corps had 4.
[6] The Canadian Corps had 5 companies; the Australian Corps, none.
[7] The Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Brigades had 4 battalions.
[8] The Canadian divisions had 3.
[9] The Canadian divisions had 3 battalions and a pontoon bridging transport unit instead of 3 companies of engineers.

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APPENDIX V

CANADIAN CORPS INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE OFFENSIVE OF THE 27TH SEPTEMBER 1918

(Sketch 4)[1]

Instructions No. 1

1. The Canadian Corps has been ordered to take part in the next general advance, operating so as to protect the left flank of the Third Army.

2. *General Idea of Operations.*—The operations of the Canadian Corps will be carried out in two phases: the first phase comprising the seizing of Bourlon Wood and the high ground about La Maison Neuve, with the left flank thrown back across the plateau via Sauchicourt Farm to thé canal at W.4.2.7 [the "e" in R. Agache]: the second phase comprises the seizing of the bridges over the Canal de l'Escaut [Schelde Canal] N.E. of Cambrai, and establishing the necessary bridgeheads, and at the same time capturing the high ground overlooking the Sensée valley between the Canal de l'Escaut and the Canal du Nord.

3. *Objectives and Boundaries.*—The attached map [see Sketch 4] shows the various objectives and boundaries for each phase.

The following amendments and additions will, however, be made:

(*a*) The 4th Canadian Division will arrange to allow the 63rd Division, XVII Corps, to form up 200 yards north of the southern corps boundary, in accordance with arrangements already made between these divisions.

(*b*) The boundary between Canadian and XXII Corps, east of the Canal du Nord, will run—

(i) In first phase: * * * *

(ii) In second phase: * * * *

4. *Employment of Troops.*—(*a*) In the first phase, the 4th Canadian Division on the right and 1st Canadian Division on the left will be responsible for capturing the Blue Line and for establishing patrols on the Yellow Line, which includes the bulk of the enemy battery positions.

(*b*) In the second phase, the 3rd Canadian Division on the right, the 4th Canadian Division in the right centre, the 1st Canadian

[1] On the sketch the Red Line is marked the first objective; the Green Line, the second; the Blue Line, the third. The Yellow Line is about 1,200 yards beyond the third objective; the Brown Line is Ramillies-Abancourt (exclusive)—Aubencheul au Bac.

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Division in the left centre and the 11th Division on the left will be responsible for the capture of the Brown Line and for exploitation beyond that line.

(*c*) The 2nd Canadian Division will be in corps reserve throughout.

(*d*) Brutinel's Brigade will be given special missions, which are detailed later.

5. *Assembly.*—The arrangements for taking over battle fronts and concentration of divisions will form the subject of a separate order.

At Zero the corps front will be held by the 4th Canadian Division on the right, the 1st Canadian Division in the centre and the 11th Division on the left. The 3rd Canadian Division will be in rear of the 1st and 4th Canadian Divisions and the 2nd Canadian Division will be in rear of the 3rd Canadian Division.

6. *Capture of the Blue Line. First Phase.*—The advance up to the Blue Line will be carried out as a set piece operation, under a creeping barrage co-ordinated under corps arrangements.

Short halts of approximately 45 minutes on the Red Line and 30 minutes on the Green Line will be made at the point of junction between divisions. The duration of the halts vary considerably on the flanks.

On leaving the Green Line, the 4th Canadian Division will envelope Bourlon Wood from the north and south, leaving the centre of the wood to be mopped up later.

The advance south of the wood will not synchronize with that on the north, and troops moving north of the wood are timed to reach the Blue Line about 30 minutes before those moving south of the wood.

Barrage maps will be issued shortly to all concerned.

7. *Exploitation beyond Blue Line in First Phase.*—Owing to the considerable variations in the time at which troops are scheduled to reach the Blue Line at different points of the front, it will not be possible to fix a general hour at which the protective barrage on this line is to cease, without losing valuable opportunities for exploitation at certain points.

Each battery, therefore, on reaching the protective barrage, will automatically stop firing after 15 minutes, unless an S.O.S. is in progress at the time. If divisions wish the protective barrage prolonged beyond 15 minutes at any particular point, they will make such arrangements as they may require.

8. *Preliminary Advance of 3rd Canadian Division and 11th Division during First Phase.*—The 3rd Canadian Division and

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11th Division will follow in rear of the 4th and 1st Canadian Divisions, but, owing to the narrow front of attack and the consequent congestion of troops and guns along the canal, it will be necessary to regulate the advance of the 3rd Canadian and 11th Divisions, so as to avoid undue congestion in the event of the leading divisions being checked.

(*a*) The advance of the 3rd Canadian Division will be regulated as follows :

(i) The leading troops will remain west of the Buissy Switch (exclusive) and south of the railway until the Red Line has been captured.

(ii) The leading troops will not commence to cross the canal till the Green Line has been captured.

(iii) The leading troops will remain west of the general line Quarry Wood–Deligny Mill till the Blue Line is captured.

(*b*) The advance of the 11th Division will be regulated as follows :

(i) The leading troops of the 34th Brigade will remain west of the general line V.24 central–V.12 central [a north-south line through Buissy], until the Red Line is captured.

(ii) The leading troops of the 34th Brigade will remain west of the canal until the Green Line is captured.

(iii) The leading troops of the 34th Brigade will remain west of the general line Deligny Mill [half way between Bourlon and Sains lez Marquion]–Keith Wood until the Blue Line is captured.

(iv) The next brigade of the 11th Division will not commence to cross the canal until the Blue Line is captured.

(*c*) The dividing line between 3rd Canadian and 11th Divisions, west of the Red Line will be southern end of Cagnicourt—junction of railway and Buissy Switch—southern end of Lock 3—Deligny Mill.

(*d*) It is essential for the success of these moves that the G.Os.C., 3rd Canadian and 11th Divisions keep in the closest possible touch with the progress of the advance of the 4th and 1st Canadian Divisions, respectively.

While the corps commander does not wish to waste any time in getting the 3rd Canadian and 11th Divisions into position on the Blue Line, he does not wish them to become involved west of the Blue Line, in the event of the two leading divisions being checked.

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9. *Second Phase.*—The time of the advance from the Blue Line (or Yellow Line if gained by 1st and 4th Canadian Divisions) cannot be determined beforehand.

The corps commander's intention is to gain as much ground as possible beyond the Blue Line on Z day, provided the enemy resistance is not more than can be overcome by open warfare tactics, i.e., by manœuvre, supported by a limited amount of artillery.

If, however, the enemy resistance cannot be overcome without considerable artillery support, which in any case will not be available till late in the afternoon, divisions will devote the remainder of Z Day to consolidation and reorganization, getting a good jumping-off line, bringing forward artillery and ammunition and making all preparations for a co-ordinated advance under a barrage, along the whole corps front in the early hours of Z plus 1 day.

The task of each division is discussed in detail below.

10. *Task of 3rd Canadian Division Second Phase.*—As soon as the Blue Line has been captured, the division will move forward as rapidly as possible and take over its allotted front from the 4th Canadian Division, relieving the troops of the latter who are holding the front. The situations which may then confront the 3rd Canadian Division appear to be:

(i) The enemy in full retreat and not holding the Marcoing Line.

In this case the 3rd Canadian Division will continue to advance with the primary object of seizing a bridgehead in the N.E. corner of Cambrai.

(ii) The enemy is holding the Marcoing Line south of the Cambrai road, but the 4th Canadian Division has succeeded in gaining a footing in Raillencourt and Sailly (see para. 11 below).

In this case the 3rd Canadian Division will work around through Raillencourt and roll up the Marcoing Line from the north and then proceed as in (i) above.

(iii) The enemy is holding the Marcoing Line in strength and 4th Canadian Division has been unable to gain a footing in Raillencourt.

In this case the 3rd Canadian Division will not advance against the Marcoing Line till the artillery situation permits of the advance being carried out under a proper barrage.

(iv) The enemy is counter-attacking the 4th Canadian Division on the Blue Line.

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In this case an immediate counter-offensive by the 3rd Canadian Division through the 4th Canadian Division would probably lead to our occupation of the Marcoing Line on the heels of the enemy.

(v) It must be remembered, however, that the corps is responsible for protecting the left flank of the Third Army, and therefore the 3rd Canadian Division must keep in close touch with 57th Division on its right and conform to the latter's movements.

11. *Task of 4th Canadian Division Second Phase.*—It is of great importance that a footing be gained in Raillencourt and Sailly, and in the Marcoing Line between the Arras and Bapaume roads, as soon as possible after the Blue Line has been captured, in order to prevent the enemy making a stand in the Marcoing Line.

If the division succeeds in gaining a footing in any part of the Marcoing Line, it should push its advance N.E. so as to roll up the line leaving a flank guard to block the line to the south until the 3rd Canadian Division is able to commence the operation mentioned in para. 10 (ii).

12. *Task of the 1st Canadian Division Second Phase.*—It is of equal importance to gain a footing in Haynecourt as soon as possible after the capture of the Blue Line in order to gain observation over the Bantigny Ravine, which is probably the enemy's main line of approach for counter-attack and also his main line of retreat for artillery.

From Haynecourt some troops should be despatched towards the S.E. corner of Epinoy, in order to assist the advance of the 11th Division on this village, while the main attack proceeds towards Abancourt station.

As the 11th Division will not be able to start for Epinoy at the same time as the 1st Canadian Division move on Haynecourt, the latter will arrange to protect its left flank against a counter-attack coming south up the valley through R.32 central [between Epinoy and Sauchy Lestrée] and will be prepared to assist in covering the right flank of the 11th Division troops moving on Oisy le Verger both from the counter-attack from north of Epinoy or from machine-gun fire from Epinoy itself.

13. *Task of the 11th Division Second Phase.*—The task of this division includes the capture of Epinoy and Oisy le Verger and the establishment of a position giving observation on the crossings over Sensée valley from Aubigny au Bac inclusive to the Canal du Nord. When this task has been completed, the 11th Division will revert to XXII Corps.

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As soon as the Blue Line has been captured, the 11th Division will move forward as rapidly as possible, and take over its allotted front from 1st Canadian Division, relieving all troops of latter who are holding that front.

The advance of the 11th Division on Epinoy and Oisy le Verger, respectively, should be made simultaneous if possible, but opportunities of pushing on should not be missed if one attack is ready to start before the other. In this case, steps must be taken to protect the flanks of the attack which starts first.

The XXII Corps are keeping a standing barrage for the 56th Division on the corps boundary north of W.6a.6.0 [about 500 yards south-west of Sauchy Lestrée] as 11th Division advances, and the latter must, therefore, arrange to keep their left at least 300 yards east of that boundary.

14. *Action of XVII Corps.*—The 63rd Division is taking the first two objectives which correspond to our Red and Green Lines.

The 57th Division passed through on the Green Line, takes the Blue Line, which includes the villages of Fontaine and Cantaing and then pushes on with a view to securing crossings over the Canal de l'Escaut [Schelde Canal].

The 4th Canadian and 3rd Canadian Divisions will work in closest possible touch with the above divisions during the different stages of the advance.

15. *Action of the XXII Corps.*—As soon as the Blue Line has been captured, the 169th Brigade, 56th Division, commences crossing the Canal north of the Arras–Cambrai road (exclusive).

This brigade then takes over the front from 1st Canadian Division west of W.6c.5.5. [about the southern end of Sauchy Lestrée] relieving all troops of the latter on this front, and commences rolling up the Canal du Nord Line covered by a creeping barrage arranged by XXII Corps.

16. *Action of Corps Reserve.*—The 2nd Canadian Division will hold itself in readiness to move at 2 hours' notice from zero hour.

Should the Blue Line be captured according to plan, the division will probably be moved forward to Quéant–Pronville–Inchy area on the afternoon of Z Day.

As the advance progresses to the Brown Line, the division will be moved east of the canal to area west of Bourlon. This move is not likely to take place till Z plus 1 day.

17. *Action of Brutinel's Brigade.*—(i) At Zero, the two M.M.G. Brigades will be employed to strengthen the initial M.G. barrage, rejoining the brigade as soon as they are shot out.

(ii) The mission allotted to the brigade is to cross the Canal de l'Escaut [Schelde Canal] in the vicinity of Cambrai and to

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exploit success along the Cambrai–Iwuy–Valenciennes road, special attention being paid to securing the crossings over the Canal de l'Escaut between Cambrai and the Sensée.

(iii) There would appear to be two opportunities for a break through :—

(*a*) On Z Day, if the 4th Canadian Division succeeds in gaining Raillencourt and Sailly and thus penetrating the Marcoing Line.

(*b*) On Z plus 1 day, if the assault on the Marcoing Line by 3rd Canadian Division is successful.

(iv) The Brigade will be free to operate on any road suitable for its purpose, but care must be taken not to block the roads over the Canal du Nord longer than is absolutely necessary, as the maintenance of a continuous flow of artillery ammunition is vital to the success of the operations.

18. *Bridging of the Canal du Nord.*—Special instructions, with a map, regarding the bridging of the Canal are being issued to all concerned.

These instructions will include the allotment of roads and bridges to formations and the order of priority for the crossing of units.

19. *Machine Gun Barrage.*—Details of the initial M.G. barrage will be co-ordinated and issued to all concerned by G.O.C. Machine-gun Corps.

20. *Allotment of Artillery Second Phase.*—Artillery will be allotted for the Second Phase as follows :—

3rd Canadian Division ..	3rd Canadian Division Artillery.
	5th Canadian Division Artillery.
	8th Army Field Artillery Brigade.
	One Mobile Brigade H.A.
4th Canadian Division ..	4th Canadian Division Artillery.
	2nd Canadian Division Artillery.
	One Mobile Brigade H.A.
1st Canadian Division ..	1st Canadian Division Artillery.
	Two Army Field Artillery Brigades.
	One Mobile Brigade H.A.
11th Division	11th Division Artillery.
	Four other Field Artillery Brigades.
	One Mobile Brigade H.A.

In addition, the XXII Corps are arranging to assist the advance of 11th Division on Oisy le Verger with an enfilade barrage supplied by two Field Artillery Brigades.

21. *Tanks.*—(i) The 7th Tank Battalion (Mark IV Tanks) I Tank Brigade has been placed at the disposal of the corps.

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(ii) Tanks will be allotted as follows :—

1 coy (8 tanks) to 1st Canadian Division.
1 coy (8 tanks) to 3rd Canadian Division.
1 coy (8 tanks) to 4th Canadian Division.

(iii) In view of the obstacle created by the canal, it is doubtful if the tanks allotted to 1st and 4th Canadian Divisions can get forward fast enough to be of any material assistance before the Red Line is reached, and plans should be arranged accordingly. These tanks should not be used beyond the Blue Line, unless their advance is covered by a barrage. In any case, they cannot be counted on for Z plus 1 day.

(iv) The company allotted to 3rd Canadian Division will be kept in hand for employment on Z plus 1 day, to break the Marcoing Line.

If this line has been captured on Z Day, this company will be brought into corps reserve.

(v) O.C. 7th Tank Battalion will arrange all details direct with divisions concerned.

22. *Headquarters.*—At zero hour, headquarters will be established as under :—

Corps Report Centre, Neuville Vitasse.

Advance 4th Canadian Division, Vicinity of V.27.d.4.0 [2 miles west-north-west of Inchy].

Advance 1st Canadian Division, V.28.c. [3,000 yards north-west of Inchy].

Advance 3rd Canadian Division, Near Advance 4th Canadian Division.

2nd Canadian Division, Sun Quarry [not identified].

Advance 11th Division, V.3.b.2.6 [2 miles north-west of Buissy]. This will be shared with Advance 56th Division.

In addition, the leading brigade 11th Division will establish a joint headquarters at W.7.c.4.6 [north-west end of Buissy] with 169th Brigade, 56th Division.

23. *Communications.*—The main axis of communications, *i.e.*, the line to be followed by the corps trunk air line, will be along the east and west grid between squares V and D, W and E, X and F [an east-west line about a thousand yards north of the centre of Inchy].

Divisions will arrange to locate their headquarters, as they advance, as close as practicable to this axis.

24. Acknowledge.

A. W. Webber,
Br.-Gen., General Staff,
Canadian Corps.

23rd September 1918.

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Instructions No. 2

25. *Construction of Bridges, Roads and Light Railways.*—(i) The whole of the corps resources in Engineer units, including the field companies and pioneer battalion of 11th Division, are placed at the disposal of the C.E. Canadian Corps, for work on bridges, roads, light railways and water supply.

The C.E. will arrange to allot to divisions any engineer assistance required for work other than the above-mentioned services.

(ii) The success of the whole operations beyond the Blue Line depends on the speed with which the canal is bridged, and therefore all units must be prepared to give the engineers every possible facility and assistance to enable them to complete the bridges quickly.

This applies particularly to transport carrying bridging material which must be given priority on all roads west of canal.

(iii) The attached map [not reproduced] shows the bridges which it is proposed to construct.[1]

It is not proposed to bring up the material for the permanent heavy bridges F, G and K until the Blue Line has been captured. Therefore until these bridges are constructed heavy traffic will have to use the dry crossings C and D.

(iv) The light railways will be pushed forward over the canal with all possible speed in order that artillery ammunition may be delivered east of the canal by light railway and thus reduce the amount of wheeled traffic over the bridges.

(v) Dismounted personnel are forbidden to use any of the *lettered* bridges or crossings. They must either cross the canal where it is dry or by the footbridges in the west sections.

26. *Allotment of Bridges over Canal.*—(i) At the outset, only crossings A, B, C and D, which are crossings over the dry part of the canal, can be relied on, as some time must elapse before the horse traffic bridges E to K can be constructed.

It is impossible to say when any particular bridge will be open.

(ii) Until the bridges become available for traffic, the dry crossings will be allotted as follows :—

A and B to 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions.
C and D to 1st Canadian and 11th Divisions.

(iii) The ultimate allotment of bridges and crossings will be :—

3rd Canadian Division	A and B
4th Canadian Division	C and D
1st Canadian Division	E and F
11th Division	G, H and K.

[1] Bridge A is on the corps southern boundary, K on the northern ; the others are distributed evenly between them.

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1st Canadian and 11th Divisions must keep in close touch with the progress of the work on the bridges allotted to them, and as soon as one of their bridges is completed, each division must take steps to divert their traffic to it.

4th Canadian Division will gradually divert its own divisional traffic to its allotted bridges as the 1st Canadian Division and 11th Division traffic is diverted to their own bridges.

(iv) Divisions will be responsible for policing the bridges and crossings which are ultimately allotted to them.

A responsible officer with sufficient staff to control effectively the traffic should be detailed to each point of crossing.

In the case of the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions the control staff should be in position ready to function by Z plus 4 hours at latest.

(v) As soon as the situation permits, one crossing in each divisional sector must be reserved for west-bound traffic so as to ensure that artillery wagons returning for more ammunition are not delayed.

(vi) The C.E. will arrange for each point of crossing to be clearly marked by a large letter sign which will be visible from both sides of the canal.

(vii) *Priority.*

Priority of, and times for, crossing the canal will be laid down by divisions.

The following order of priority is suggested as a general guide :

(*a*) Field artillery brigades which are shot out after the Green Line.

(*b*) A Echelon of 1st Line Transport of infantry brigades required to operate beyond the Blue Line.

(*c*) Remainder of field artillery required by divisions for employment beyond the Blue Line.

(*d*) A Echelon 1st Line Transport of other infantry brigades.

(*e*) B Echelon 1st Line Transport of leading infantry brigades. It is for consideration whether B Echelon 1st Line Transport of brigades in divisional reserve cannot be parked west of canal till Z plus 1 day.

27. *Allotment of Roads.*—(i) Until the bridges become available for use, divisions will use roads as follows :—

3rd Canadian Division, 4th Canadian Division } Quéant–Pronville–Inchy road [westward of Inchy].

Traffic, however, will not be allowed to enter Inchy, but will be diverted around the dry weather track to south of the village.

1st Canadian Division, 11th Division } Cagnicourt–Inchy road [north-westward of Inchy].

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Divisions will arrange mutually as to order of priority of units on each road.

(ii) As soon as the bridges are open for traffic, divisions will use roads as follows :—

(*a*) 3rd Canadian Division.—Quéant–Pronville–Inchy road. Traffic, however, will not be allowed to enter Inchy, but will be diverted by the dry weather track to south of the village.

(*b*) 4th Canadian Division.—Quéant–Buissy road to cross-roads in V.28.b. [3,000 yards north-west of Inchy], thence through Inchy.

(*c*) 1st Canadian Division—Cagnicourt–Inchy road to cross-roads in V.28.b., thence through Buissy to W.13 central [east end of Buissy] and thence S. and S.E. to crossings E. and F. No transport to enter Inchy.

(*d*) 11th Division.—Arras–Cambrai road and roads from Cagnicourt and Villers Cagnicourt to Baralle [adjoining north-east end of Buissy], and thence either via W.13 central to crossing G or to main Arras road.

(iii) Divisions will be responsible for traffic control on the roads allotted to them in (ii) above, and in addition as under :—

3rd Canadian Division	..	Quéant and Pronville.
4th Canadian Division	..	Inchy.
1st Canadian Division	..	Cross roads V.28.b and Buissy.
11th Division ..	..	Baralle.

(iv) Roads east of the canal will be used in accordance with the tactical situation, but, as far as possible, transport will keep clear of the village of Sains lez Marquion once the bridges are open for traffic.

28. Acknowledge.

A. W. Webber,
Br.-General, General Staff,
Canadian Corps.

25th September 1918.

Instructions No. 3

29. *Preliminary Advance of 11th Division. First Phase*—Reference paragraph 8 (*b*) of Instructions No. 1.

The restrictions imposed in above paragraph on the advance of the 11th Division are cancelled, and the following substituted :—

(*b*) The advance of the 11th Division will be regulated as follows :—

The 11th Division will follow the 1st Canadian Division, but the G.O.C. 11th Division will so order his advance as

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to ensure that no portion of his division becomes involved in the fighting until the Blue Line has been captured.

30. *Second Phase*—Reference paragraph 9 of Instructions No. 1. The first sub-paragraph is cancelled and the following substituted :—

The time of the advance from the Blue Line, and the progress of this further advance, cannot be definitely laid down, except in the following cases :

(*a*) The advance of the 11th Division on Epinoy and Oisy le Verger will leave the Blue Line at Zero plus 2 hours.

(*b*) The 1st Canadian Division will not advance beyond Haynecourt until the 11th Division has come up into line on the left.

31. *Task of 11th Division. Second Phase*—Reference paragraph 13 of Instructions No. 1.

The third sub-paragraph is cancelled and the following substituted :—

The advance of the 11th Division on Epinoy and Oisy le Verger will be simultaneous and will leave the Blue Line under a barrage at Zero plus 9 hours.

Details of this barrage are being issued to all concerned.

32. *Heavy Artillery Action. Second Phase*—(i) A map [not reproduced] is being issued to all concerned showing the time zones for *Heavy Artillery under Corps Control.*

The times shown on each line is the hour at which the leading infantry are expected to reach that line. The fire of the heavy artillery will be adjusted so as not to impede the advance of the infantry.

(ii) It must be clearly understood that these lines govern only the action of the heavy artillery under corps control after the Blue Line has been gained.

At that time each division has a H.A. Mobile Brigade under its orders, who are available to shoot on any targets given by the divisions, regardless of these lines.

(iii) Should the advance of the infantry be delayed, and favourable targets thus appear west of the Time Zone, the fire of the heavy artillery under corps control can be brought back on to any targets in a divisional sector at the request of the divisional commander. This request will be sent direct to the C.B.S.O. [Countery-Battery Staff Officer] by the quickest method and must state :—

(*a*) Position and nature of target.
(*b*) Approximate position of nearest infantry.
(*c*) Time at which fire is to open.
(*d*) Duration of bombardment.

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On this request the C.B.S.O. will open an intense bombardment from as many guns as can bear. Fire can be brought to bear within 15 minutes of the request reaching C.B.S.O.

(iv) As soon as a division knows that its advance has been definitely checked, the C.B.S.O. should be notified at once, in order that the heavy artillery fire may be brought back to within safety limits of the infantry.

33. *Action of the Royal Air Force.*—The 1st Brigade R.A.F. is arranging for fighting and bombing machines to prevent the enemy using the crossings over the Sensée canal at Wasnes, Hem Lenglet, Fressies, Aubencheul au Bac, Abbé au Verger Farm and Palluel.

These machines will also be working in close co-operation with the C.B.S.O. and will assist him in taking on favourable targets in the heavy artillery zone.

34. *Contact Planes.*—(i) No. 5 Squadron R.A.F. will provide contact planes to fly at the following hours :—

(*a*) Zero plus 2 hours to Zero plus 2½ hours.

(*b*) Zero plus 4¼ hours to Zero plus 5 hours.

(*c*) Zero plus 6¼ hours to Zero plus 7 hours.

(*d*) Zero plus 8½ hours to Zero plus 9 hours and thereafter every 3 hours for half an hour.

(ii) Contact machines will carry markings as follows :—

A black band on the middle of the underside of each bottom plane and black streamers in prolongation of the black band.

(iii) All troops will again be warned of the vital necessity for lighting flares when called for by the contact plane. In addition, all troops in front line who have had the white strips fitted to their box respirators in accordance with instructions given in letter of 22.9.18 will indicate their position by showing these strips.

35. *Light Signals.*—Light signals will be normal as laid down in instructions given on 24.7.18.

In addition, the 4th Canadian Division are using a gold and silver rain rocket which will be fired from the Blue Line east of Bourlon Wood as soon as the troops attacking round the north side of the wood have reached the Blue Line.

36. Acknowledge.

A. W. Webber,
Br.-General,
General Staff, Canadian Corps.

25th September 1918.

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APPENDIX VI

FOURTH ARMY OPERATION ORDER

22ND SEPTEMBER 1918

(Sketch 10)[1]

1. At an hour and on a date to be notified later, the Fourth Army will attack the Hindenburg Defences between St. Quentin and Vendhuille.

2. The objectives, and boundaries between corps, and between Fourth Army and the neighbouring Armies, are shown on the attached map [see sketch 10].

On as early a date as possible the IX and III Corps will secure the Dotted Blue Line. Should the III Corps be unable to reach this line before relieved the II American Corps will secure it as soon as possible after they have relieved the III Corps.

3. The first objective (Green Line) on the Australian Corps front will be captured by the American II Corps supported by the artillery of the Australian Corps. The Australian Corps will then leap-frog and capture the Red Line.

4. (*a*) After the capture of the Green Line, the American II Corps will exploit success northwards and southwards (Dotted Green Lines) :—

> To the north with a view to assisting the advance of the V Corps [Third Army] over the canal, and to protecting the Australian Corps left in their advance to the Red Line ;
>
> to the south with a view to assisting the IX Corps in their advance across the canal, and to protecting the Australian Corps right in their advance to the Red Line.

(*b*) As soon as the attacking divisions of the Australian Corps have passed through the Green Line, the American II Corps, less the exploiting troops mentioned in (*a*) above, will concentrate and be prepared to advance eastwards on a one-division front, in touch with the Australian Corps on their right and with the V Corps of the Third Army on their left.

5. (*a*) The IX Corps will commence its attack simultaneously with the American II Corps and capture its first and second objectives (Green and Red Lines).

(*b*) It will gain touch with the American Corps on the Dotted Green Line, and with the Australian Corps on the Red Line.

---

[1] On the sketch the
Dotted Blue Line is marked Preliminary Objective.
Green Line is marked First Objective.
Dotted Green Line is marked First Extra Objective.
Red Line is marked Second Objective.

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(*c*) It will exploit southward with a view to assisting the French First Army. Further orders will be issued later as regards this.

6. The III Corps will hold a defensive front between the Australian Corps and the V Corps until the Green Line has been reached by the American II Corps. When the troops of the American II Corps commence their exploitation towards the Dotted Green Line, the III Corps will mop up the ground west of the canal, shown hachured in red on the attached map [Sketch 10]. It will then be concentrated in an area to be notified later, and come into Army reserve.

7. All further orders regarding the operations will be issued in the form of instructions.

8. Acknowledge by wire.

A. A. Montgomery,
Major-General,
General Staff, Fourth Army.

APPENDIX VII

FOURTH ARMY OPERATION ORDER

5TH OCTOBER 1918

(Sketch 15)[1]

1. The Fourth Army will continue the attack on a date which has been communicated verbally to those concerned, and at an hour to be notified later. This attack will be in conjunction with an attack by the Third Army on its left and the First French Army on its right.

2. Objectives and tactical boundaries between corps and between Fourth Army and neighbouring Armies are shown on attached map.[2]

3. (*a*) The 18-pdr. barrage will come down at zero 200 yards in front of the infantry starting line.

The 4·5 in. barrage will come down 200 yards beyond the 18-pdr. barrage.

Corps will arrange for the action of heavy artillery.

(*b*) Lifts will be 100 yards.

The first lift will be at 0 + 3.

---

[1] On the sketch the
Red Line is the Objective.
Green Line is the Line of Exploitation.

[2] Not reproduced (see Sketch 15).

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Up to the 12th lift inclusive, lifts will be at 3 minutes interval, after that until the Red Line is reached at 4 minutes interval.

(*c*) There will be a protective barrage on the Red line for 30 minutes, after which barrages will cease and the further advance of the infantry and tanks will be covered by specially detailed brigades of mobile Field Artillery.

4. (*a*) Tanks are allotted as follows :—

IX Corps	1 Company Whippets.
II American Corps	2 Companies Whippets. 2 Bns. Mk. V (1 for dealing with Brancourt. 1 to be held in corps reserve for emergencies).
XIII Corps ..	1 Company Whippets. 1 Bn. Mk. V to be held in corps reserve for emergencies.

(*b*) Whippets will follow up the barrage with, or close behind, the infantry, and as soon as the protective barrage lifts off the Red Line they will push on at once independently, and exploit to the Green Line, beyond which general line they should not go. They will assist the infantry and Cavalry Corps to reach, and the Cavalry Corps to pass, the Green Line.

(*c*) R.A.F. will arrange direct with Corps for covering the advance of the Tanks to their starting line.

5. (*a*) The Cavalry Corps will be in a position of readiness at zero on "Z" day ready to exploit success and carry out the mission already allotted to them.

(*b*) The Cavalry Corps will keep in the closest touch with the advancing infantry and tanks so that there may be no delay in pressing forward as soon as the enemy's resistance has been definitely broken on the Red or Green lines.

(*c*) The decision as to moment for passing the cavalry through is delegated to G.O.C., Cavalry Corps.

6. Red flares will be employed by all corps.

7. The IX Corps will arrange for the cavalry brigade which has been allotted to it to exploit in the direction of Fresnoy and Bohain.

8. Acknowledge by wire.

A. A. Montgomery,
Major-General,
General Staff, Fourth Army.

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Sketch 1.

26TH SEPTEMBER 1918
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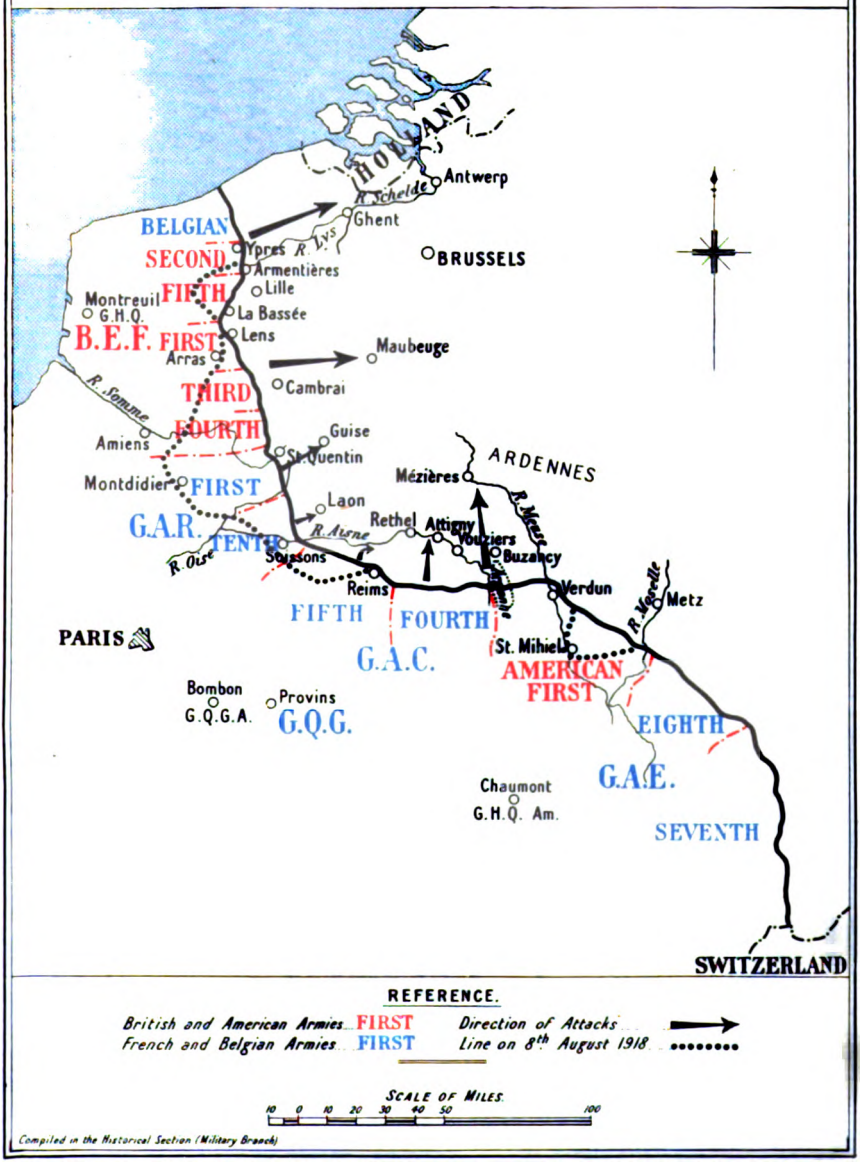

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British and American Armies FIRST — *Direction of Attacks* →
French and Belgian Armies FIRST — *Line on 8th August 1918* .....

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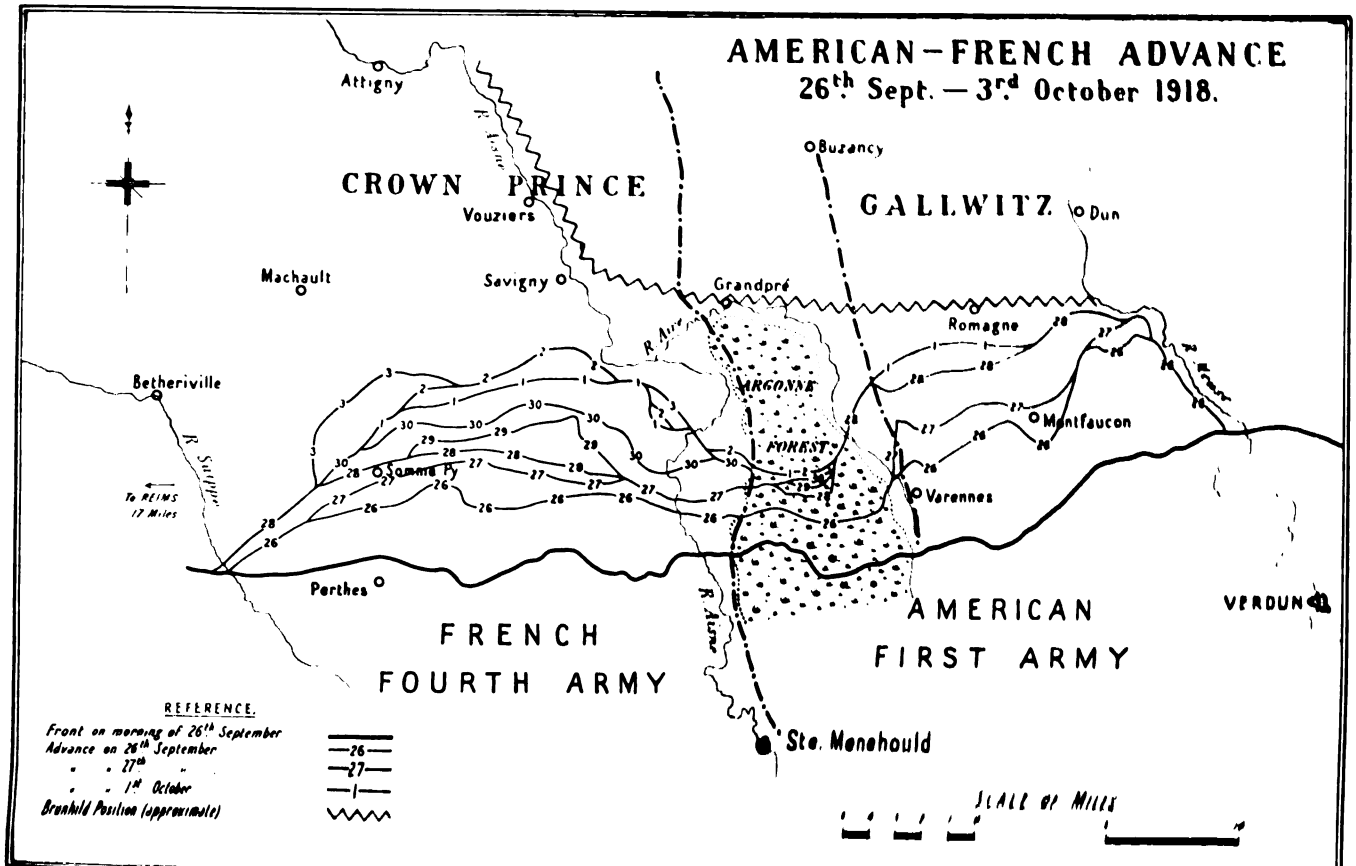

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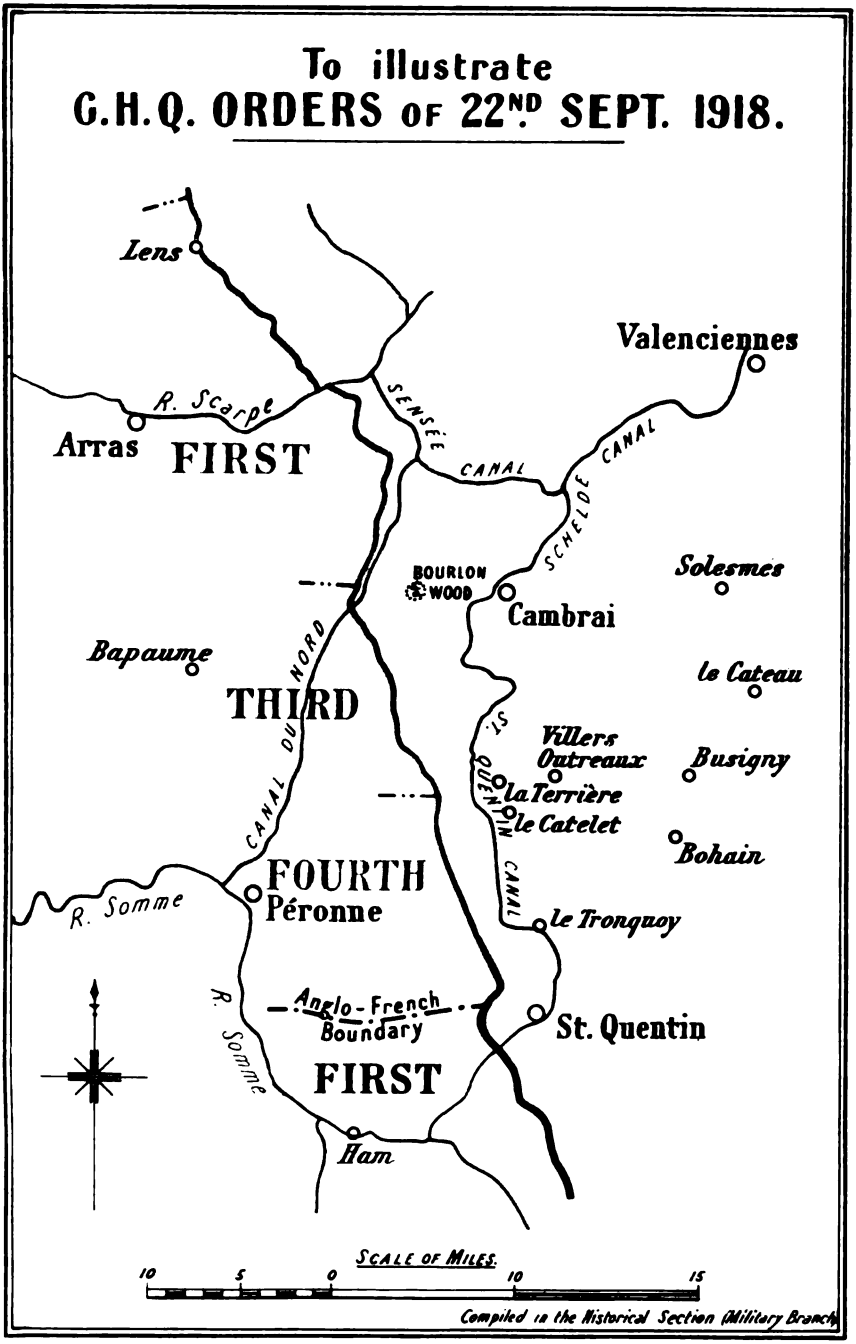

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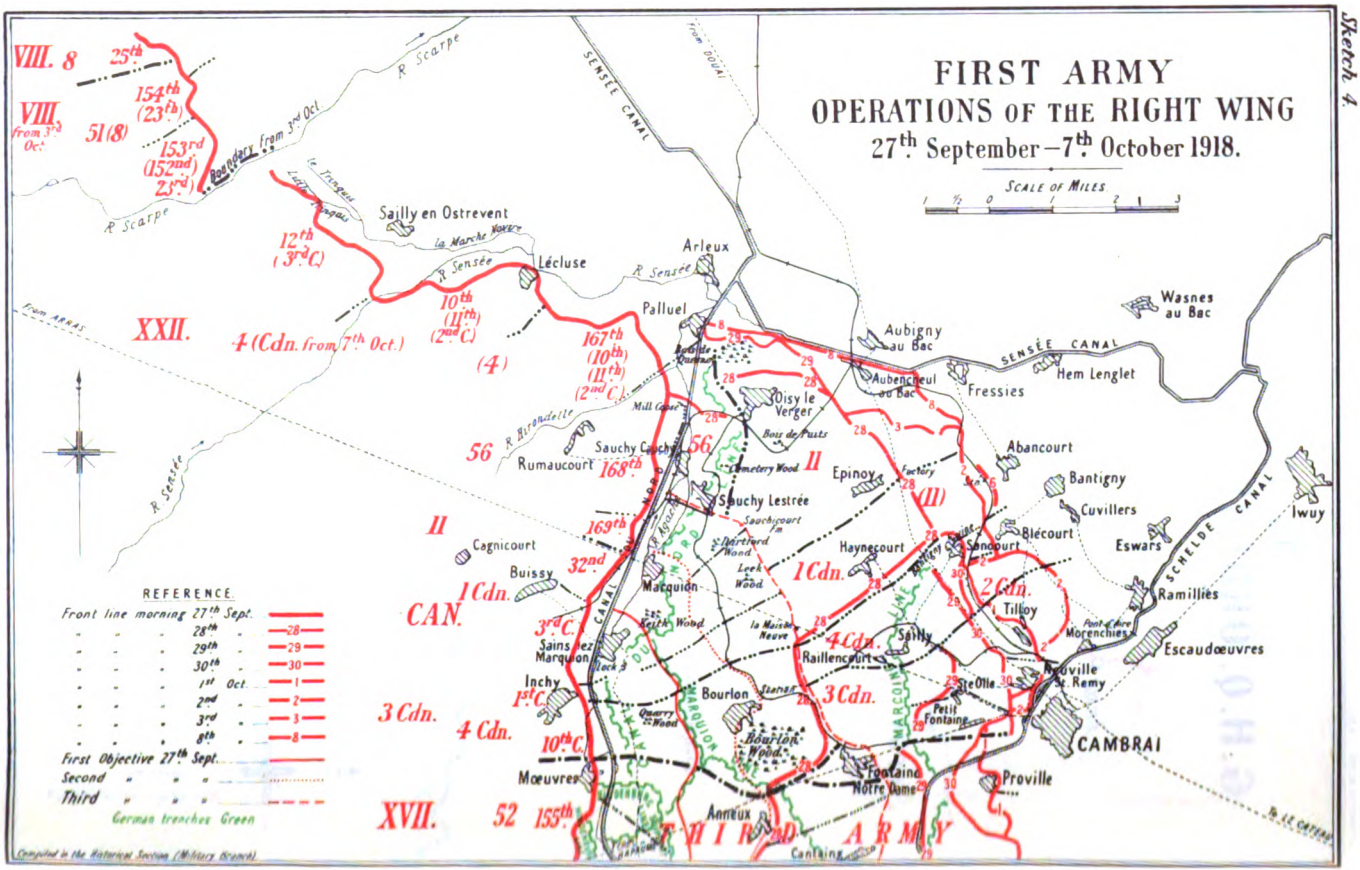

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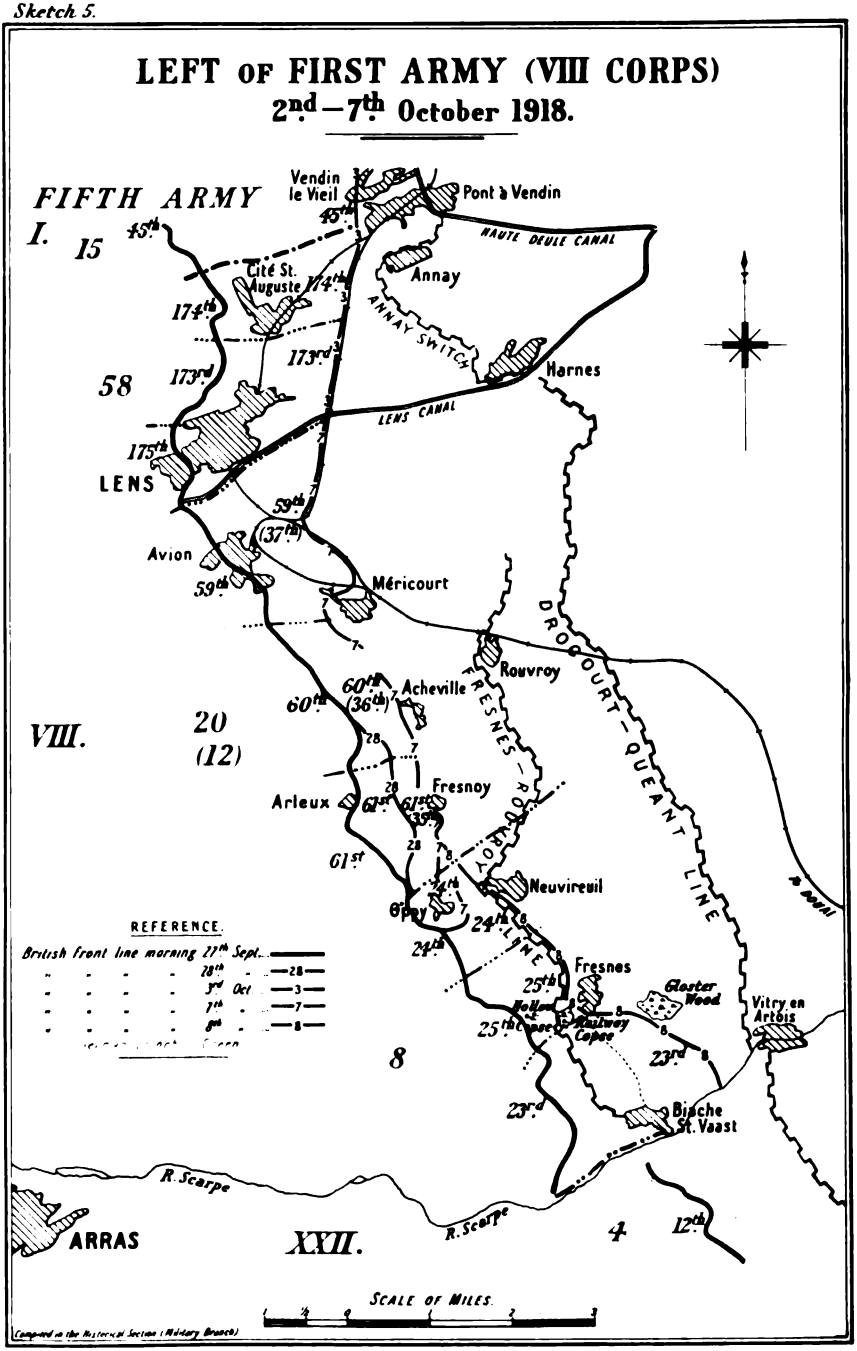

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Sketch 6.

THIRD ARMY

27th September – 7th October 1918.

FIRST ARMY
THIRD ARMY
FOURTH ARMY
1 Cdn.
1st C.
Pronville
4 Cdn.
10th C.
Bourlon
Bourlon Wood
3 Cdn.
Fontaine Notre Dame
CAMBRAI
Proville
Tadpole Copse
Mœuvres
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52
XVII.
57
155th
Anneux
Graincourt
Cantaing
Awoingt
Niergnies
Noyelles
Doignies
Gds.
2nd C.
Demicourt
VI.
62
Flesquieres
Marcoing
Rumilly
Seranvillers
Hermies
3
8th
Havrincourt
Ribecourt
Masnieres
Grevecœur
les Rues des Vignes
NZ.
Lesdains
42
37
IV.
Havrincourt Wood
Trescault
Beaucamp
Neuville Bourjonval
Villers Plouich
Vaucelles
Bois Pelin
Bel Aise
Metz en Couture
5
13th
15th
Banteux
Banteuzelle
Gouzeaucourt
21
62nd
Gonnelieu
Villers Guislain
Honnecourt
Villers Outreau
110th
98th
33
V.
17
38
Heudicourt
la Terrière
Aubencheul au Bois
100th
Ossus
12
Vendhuille
50
XIII.
le Catelet
Bony
Beaurevoir
Canal du Nord
Canal de la Sensée
Marquion Line
Hindenburg Line
Masnières Beaurevoir Line
Highland Road
Wellington Road
Bonavis Ridge
Bonavis Fm.
Bonne Enfance Fm.
Mont Courtez Fm.
Bois du Marteau
Little Priel fm.
Marcoing Fm.
la Pannerie (South)
Bois Latreux
Bois des Chaufours
Bois de Paris
Tog de Paris
Bois de la Grenouillere
Bois de l'Eau
Bonnecourt Wood
Gauche Wood
Orival Wood
Premy Chapel
Premy Farm
Nine W.
Mt sur l'Oeuf
Pathé au Flot
Les Rues Vertes
Boar Copse
Boar Factory
Quarry
Bois Latreux
Old Mill
Old Mill Farm
Bonavis Ridge
Vacquerie
Fosseux
Bois des Grenouillers
Bois de la Grenouillere
Bois de Paris
Tog de Paris

Sketch 7.

FLANDER'S OFFENSIVE

28th Sept. — 2nd Oct. 1918.

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Sketch 8.

SECOND ARMY
28th September 1918.

3269

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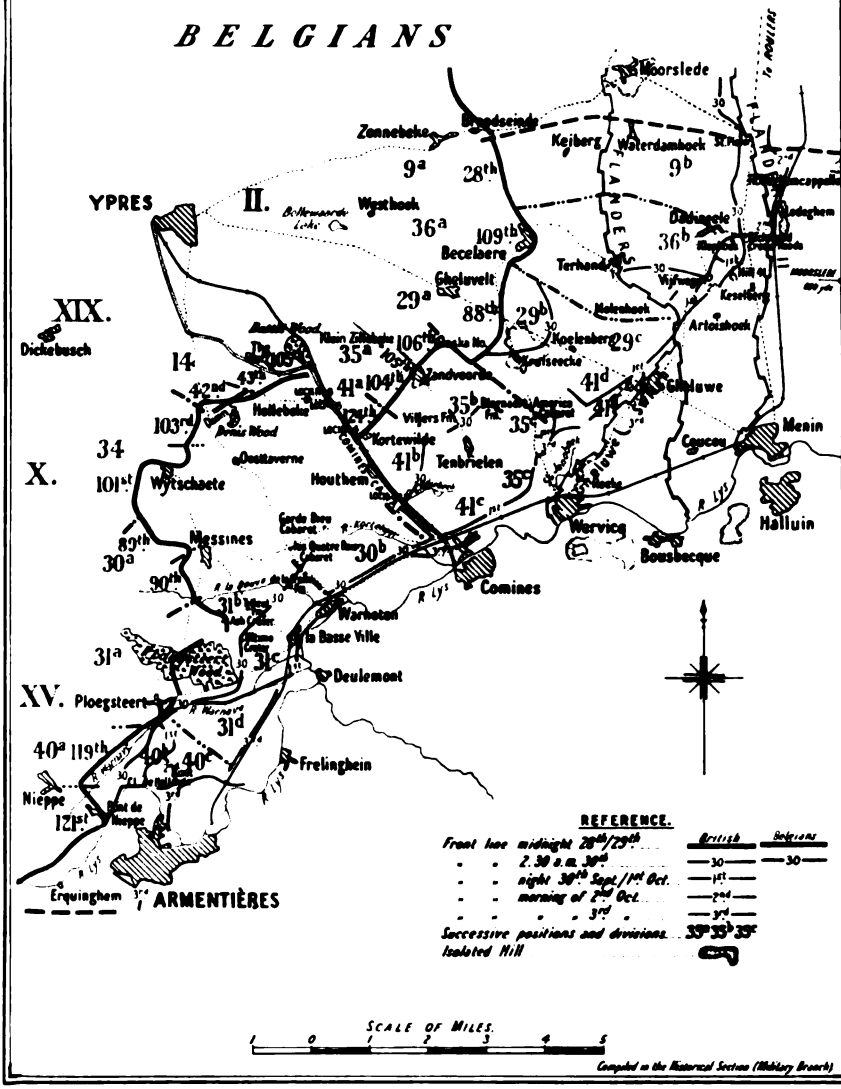
Sketch 9.

SECOND ARMY

29th September - 3rd October 1918.



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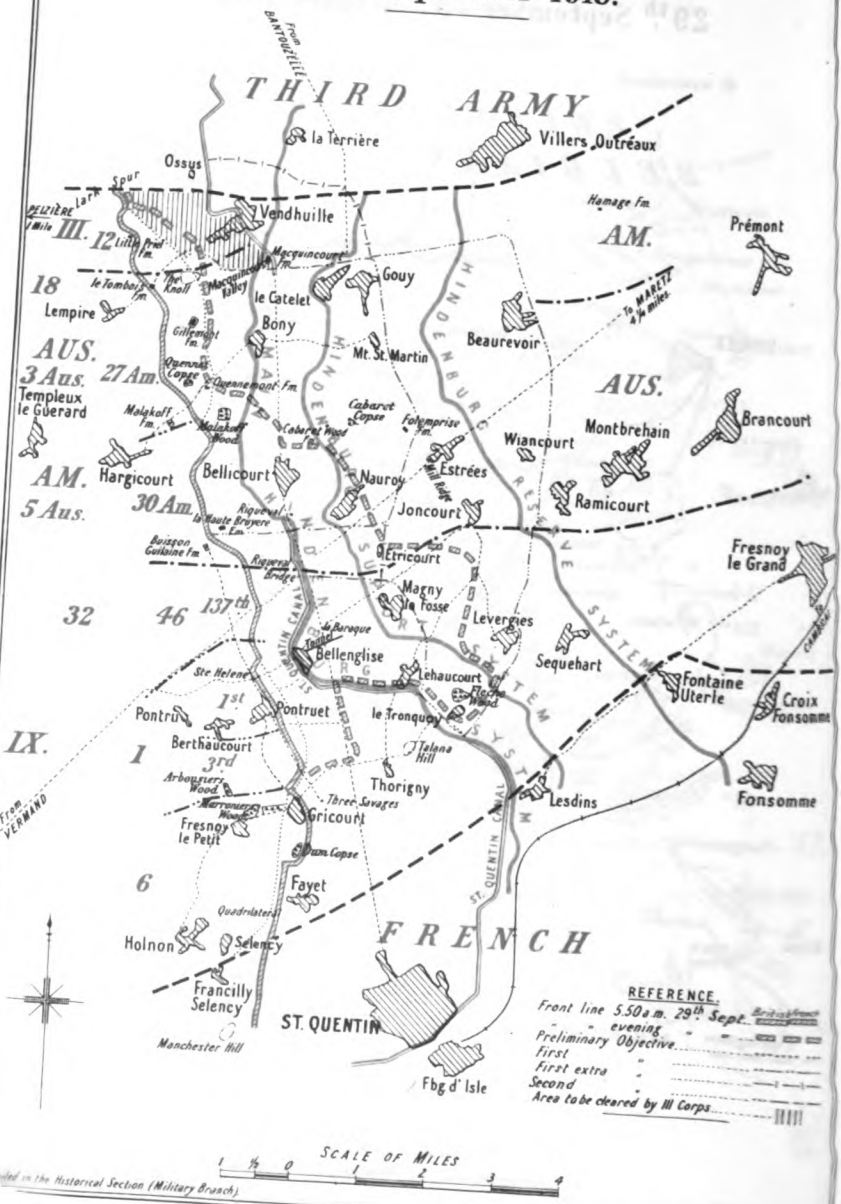
Sketch 10.

FOURTH ARMY
29th September 1918.



...ained in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

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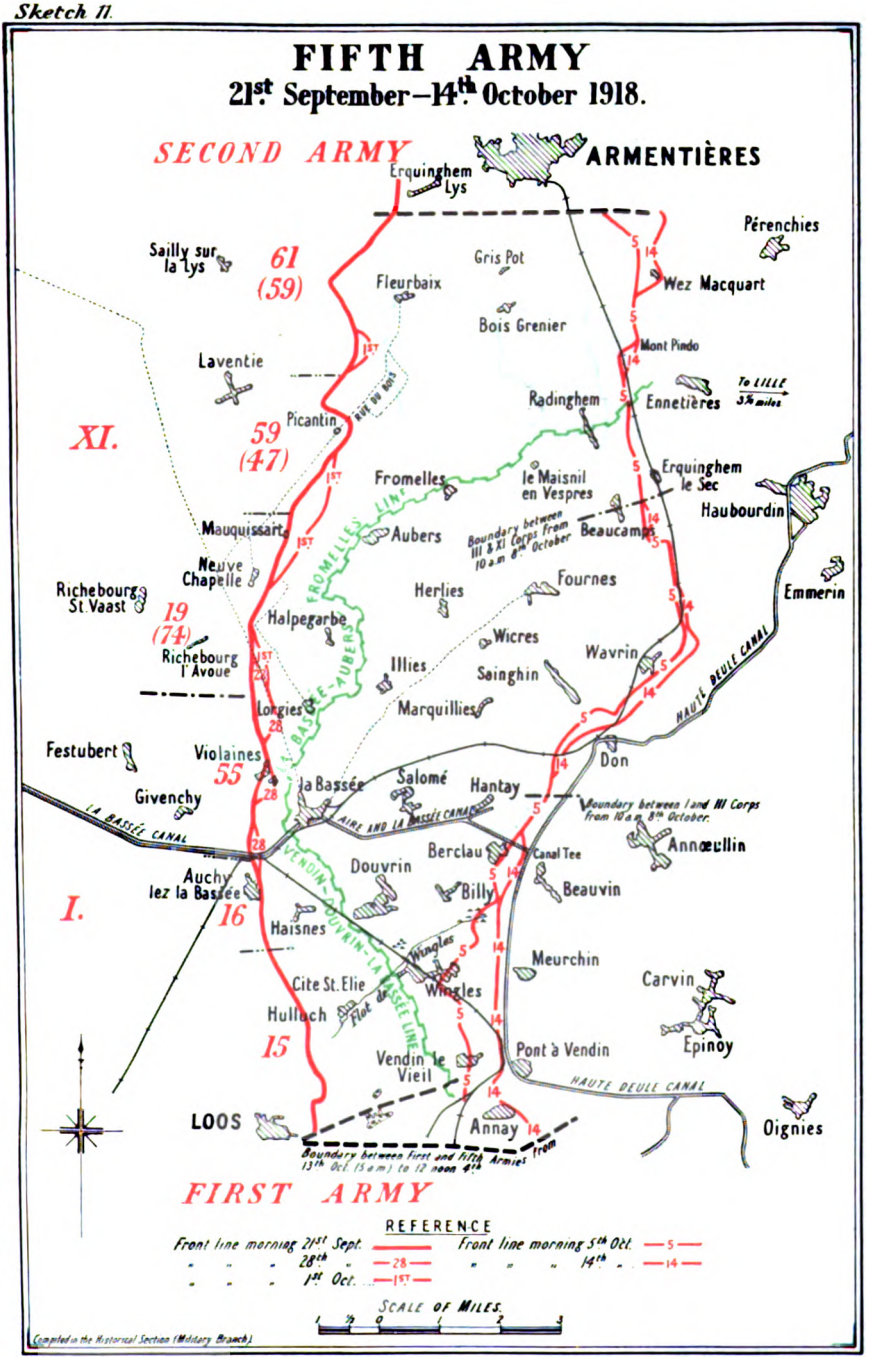
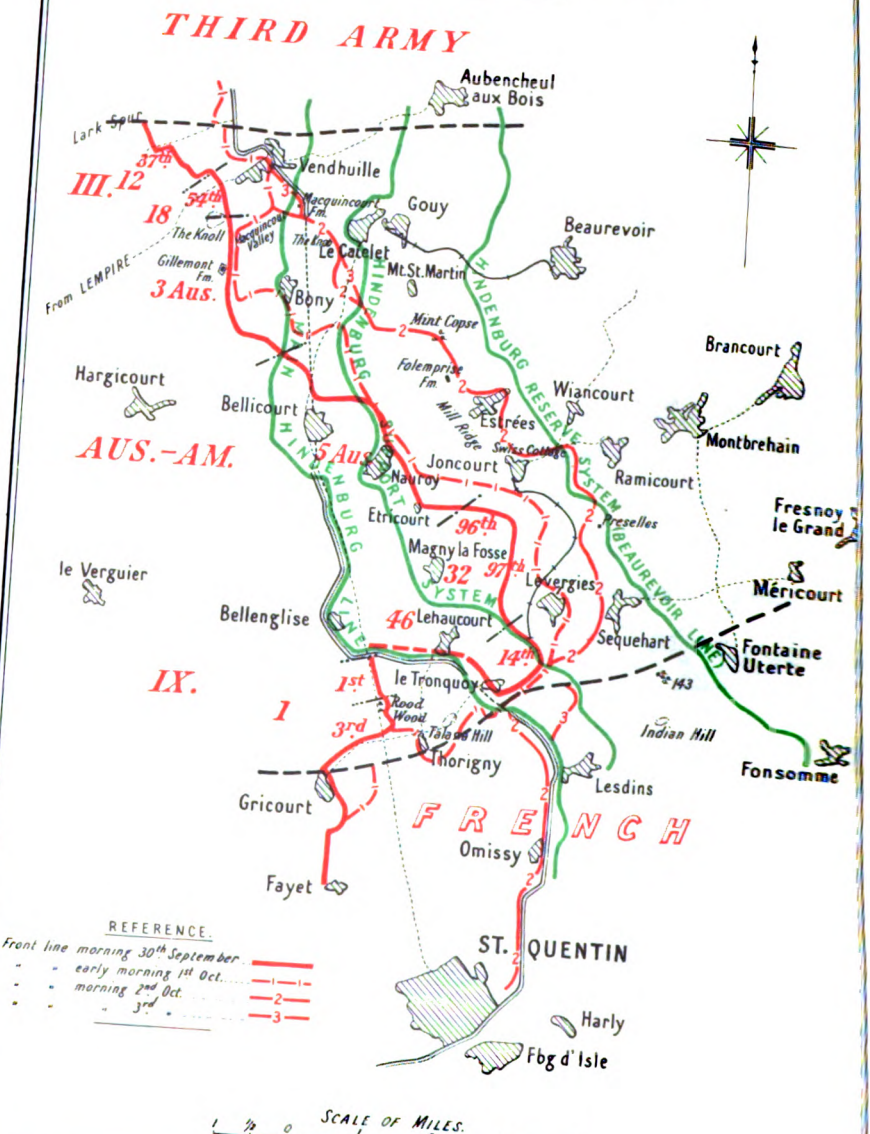
Sketch II.



Digitized by Google

Sketch 12.

FOURTH ARMY
30th September – 3rd October 1918.

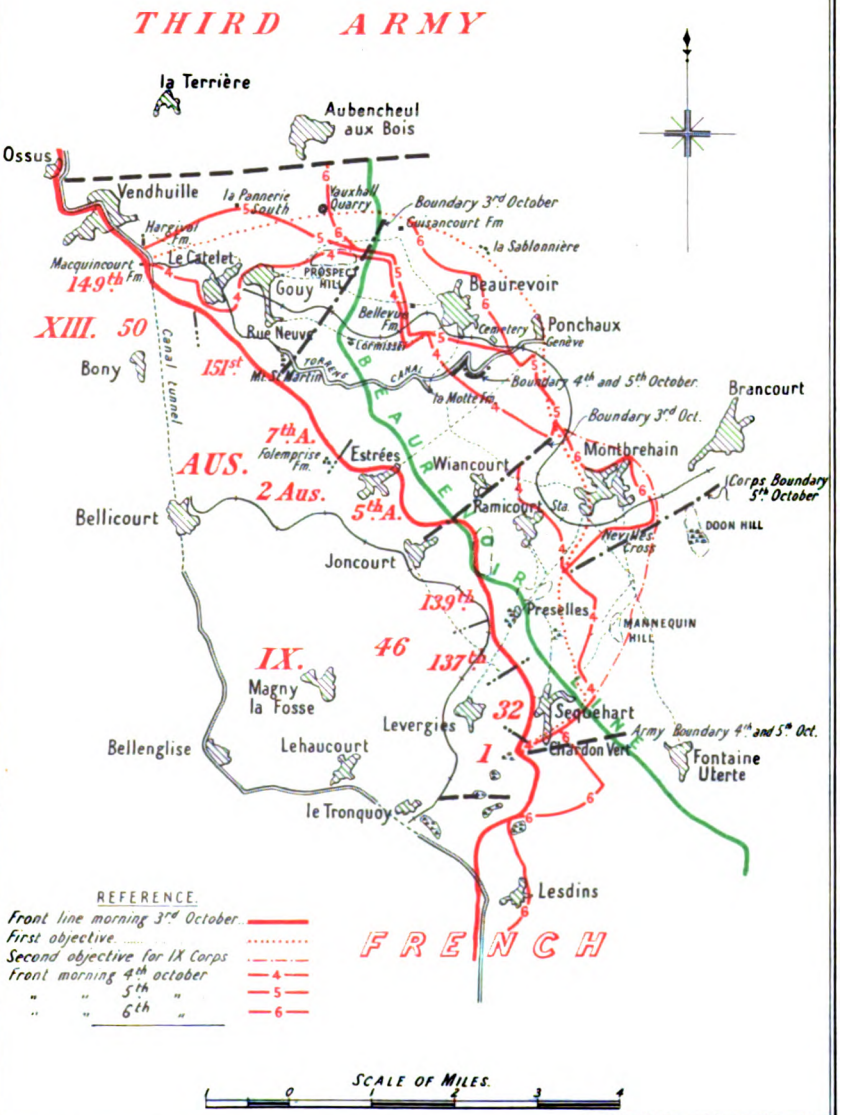


Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

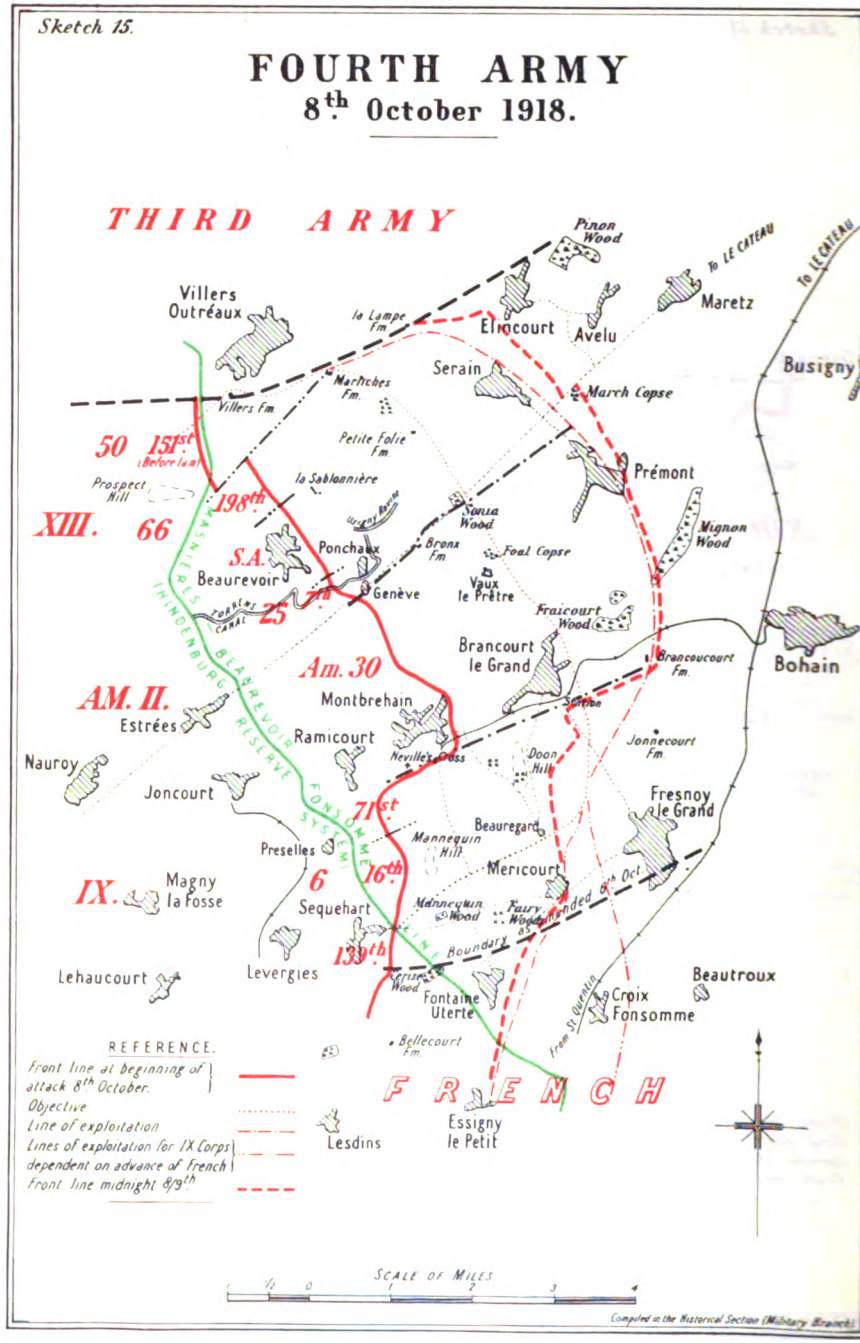
Digitized by Google

Sketch 13.

FOURTH ARMY
3rd — 6th October 1918.

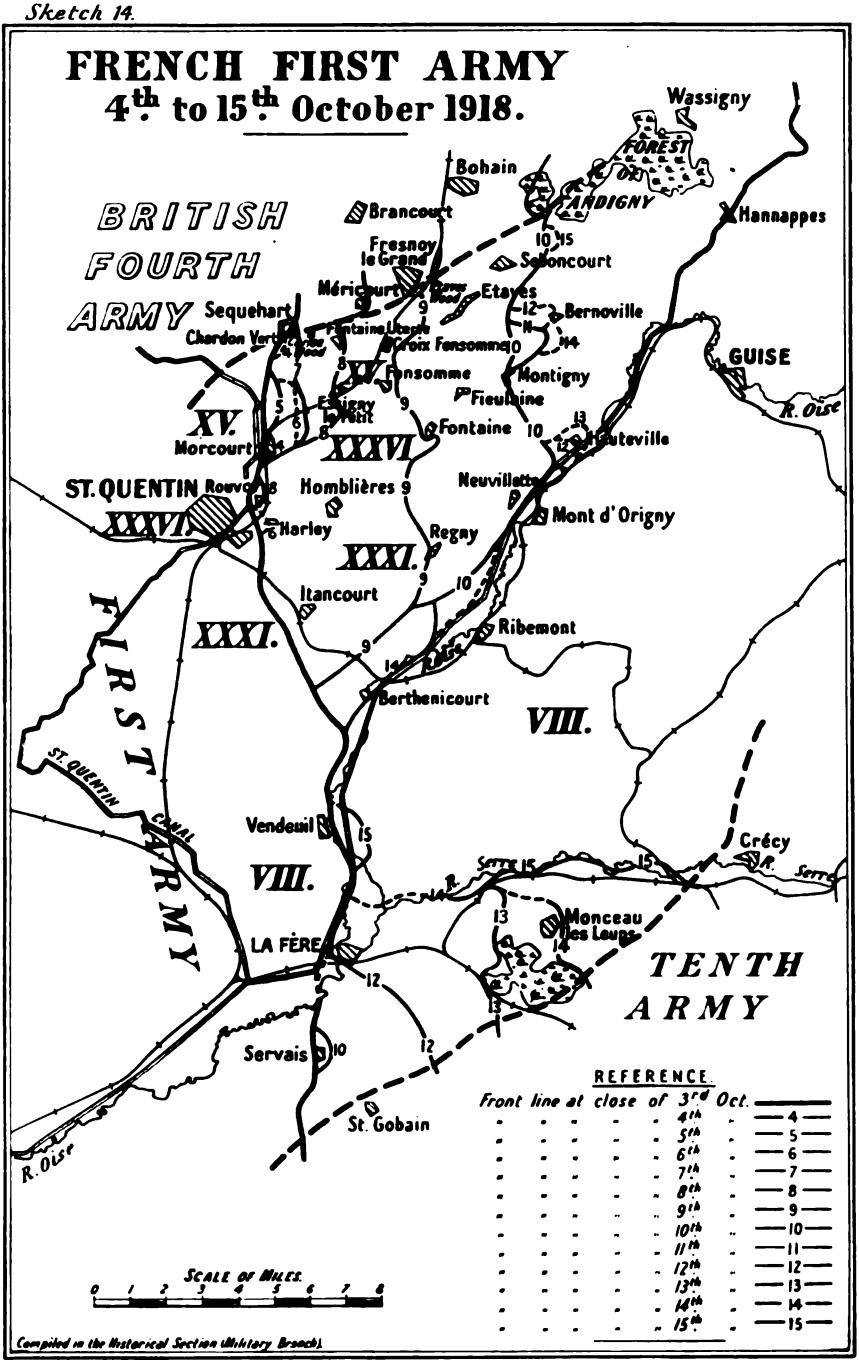


Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

Sketch 14.



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Sketch 16.

THIRD ARMY
8th — 19th October 1918.

REFERENCE.

First Objective 8th Oct. 1918	.....	British front line morning 10th Oct.	—10—
Second	— — — —	" " " 11th "	—11—
Third	— — — —	" " " 12th "	—12—
British front line morning 8th Oct.	—8—	" " " 13th "	—13—
" " " 9th "	—9—	" " evening 19th "	—19—

SCALE OF MILES.

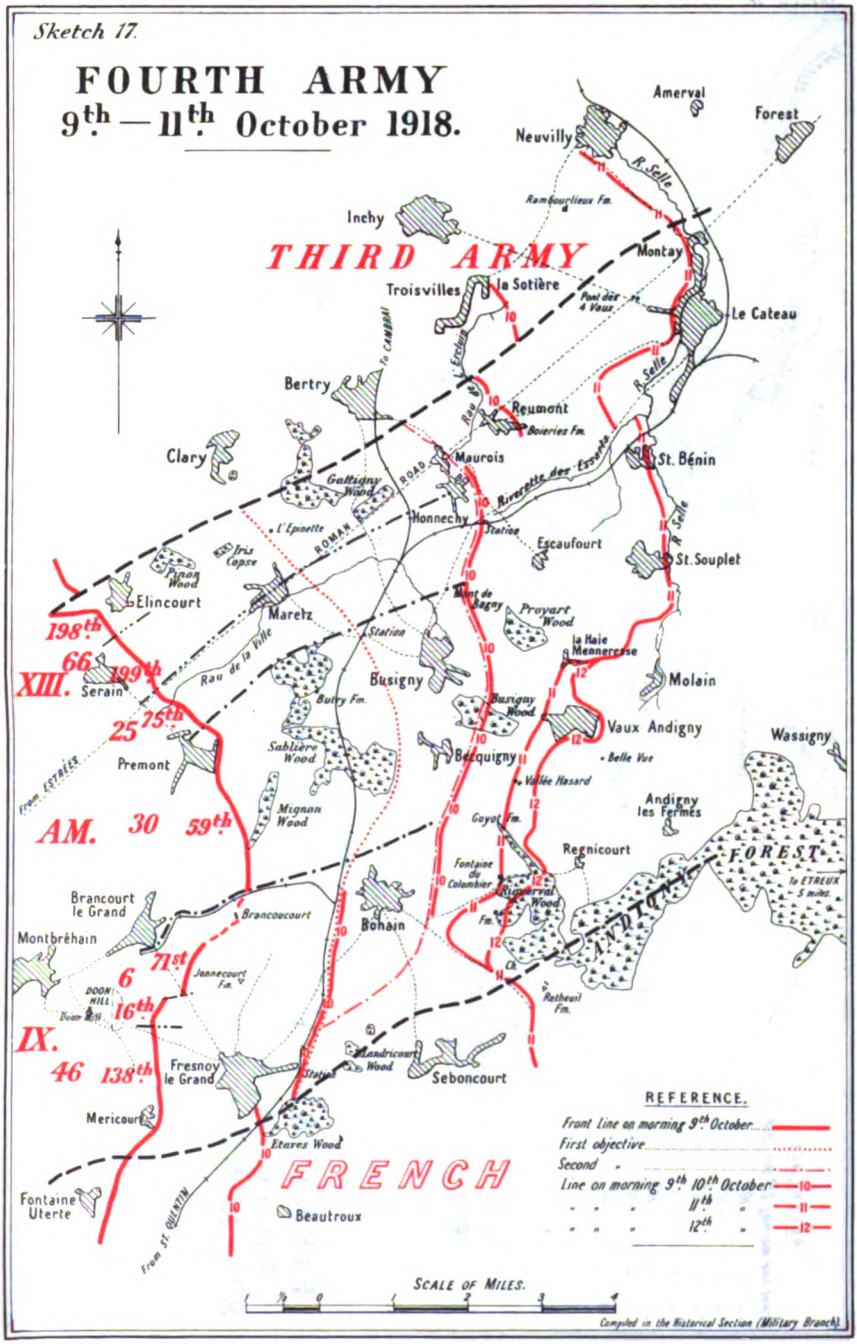
1 ½ 0 1 2 3 4 5

Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

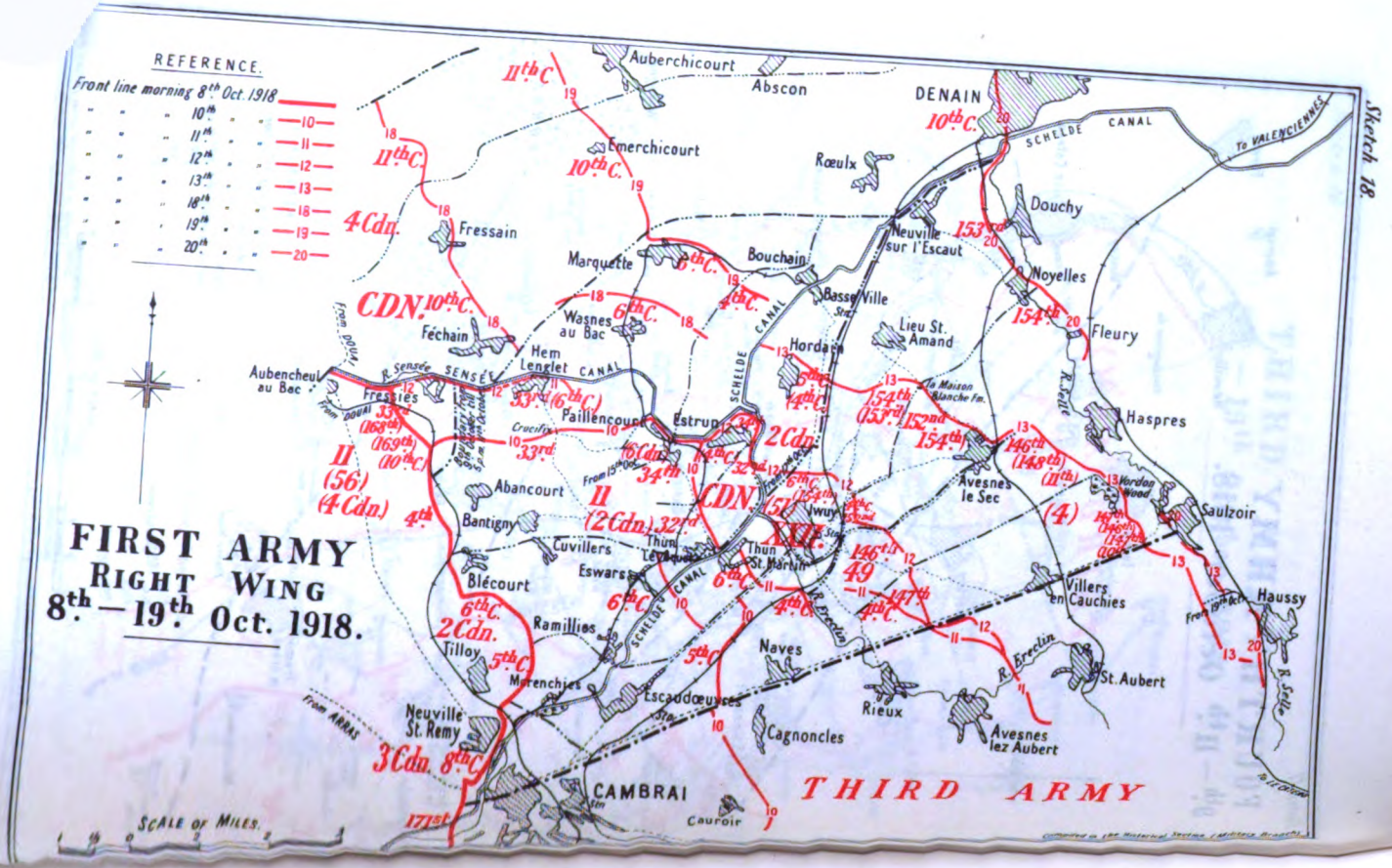
Digitized by Google

Sketch 17.

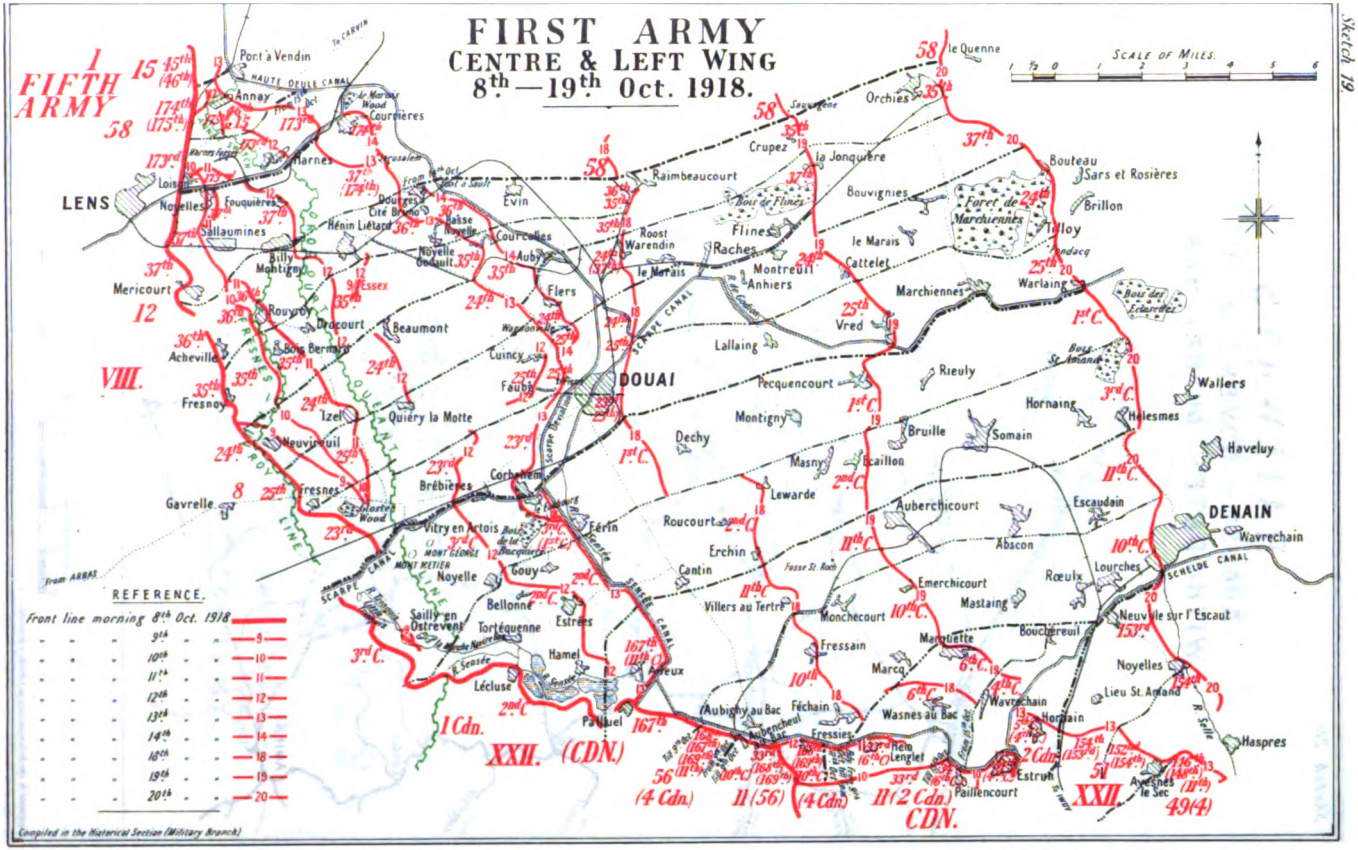
FOURTH ARMY
9th — 11th October 1918.



Digitized by Google



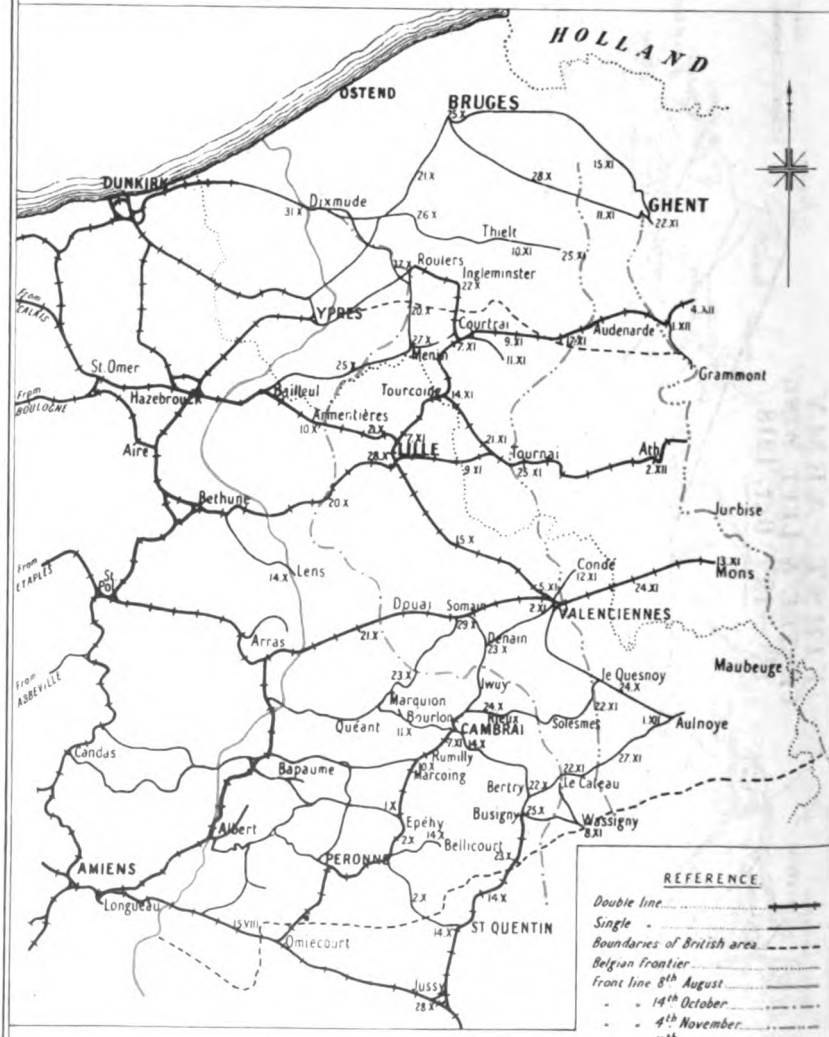
Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

Sketch 20

RAILWAYS
AUGUST — NOVEMBER 1918
WITH DATES OF RAILHEADS.



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

3269/5

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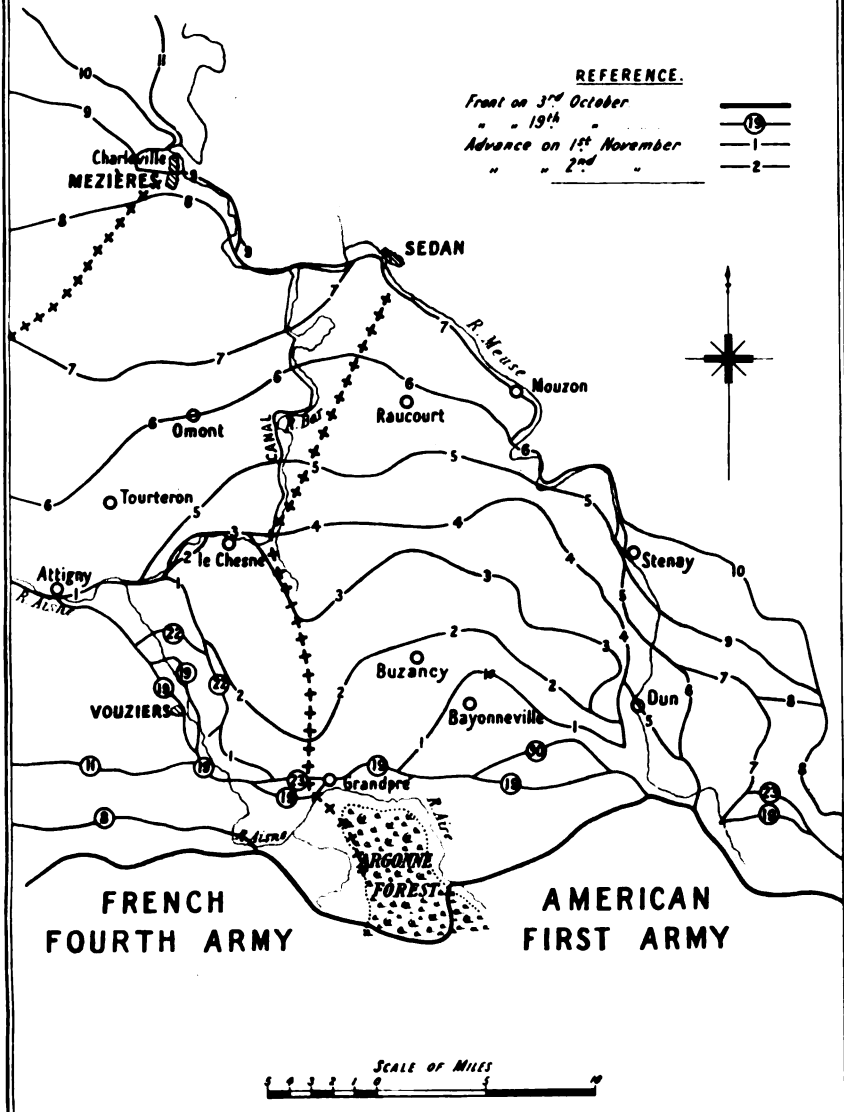
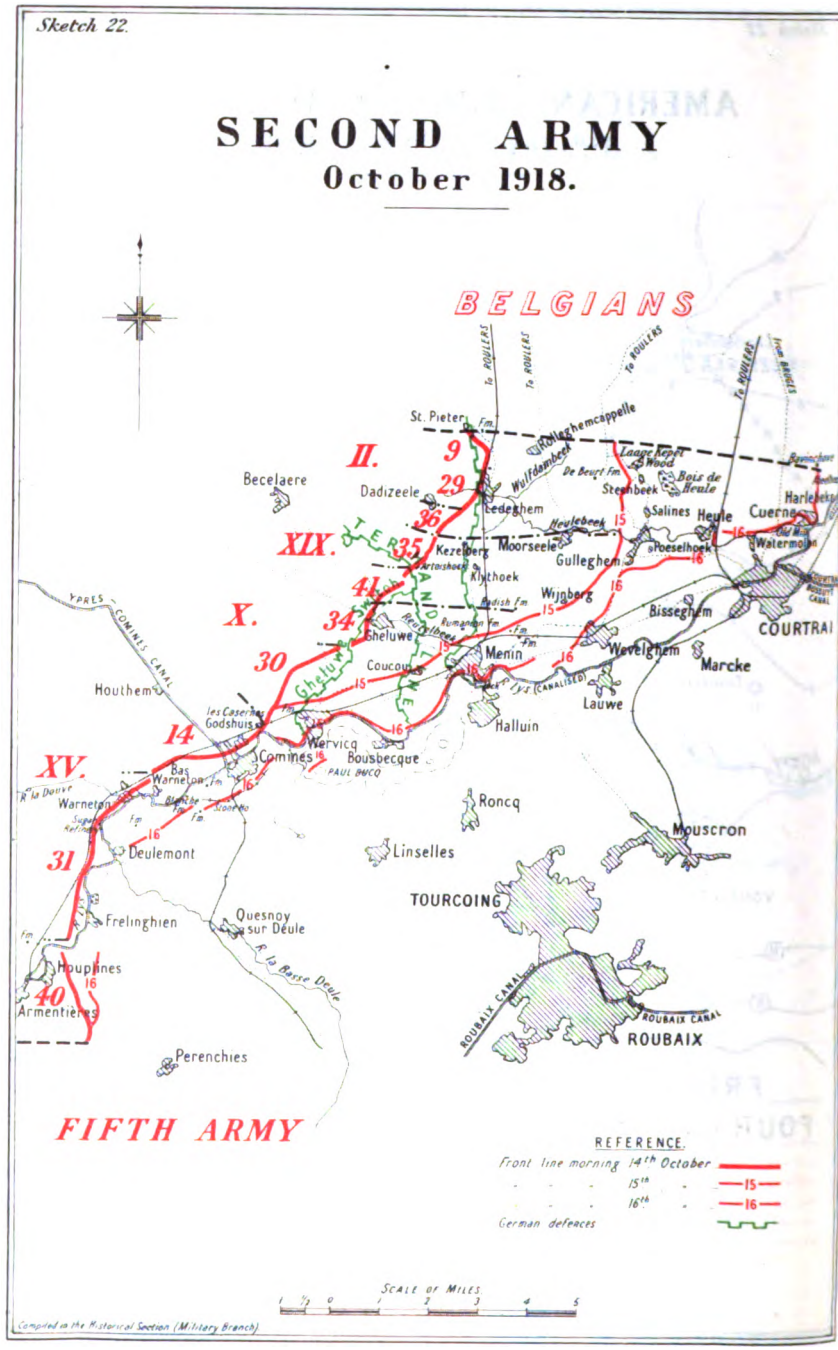
Sketch 21.

AMERICAN — FRENCH ADVANCE
3rd Oct. — 11th Nov. 1918.

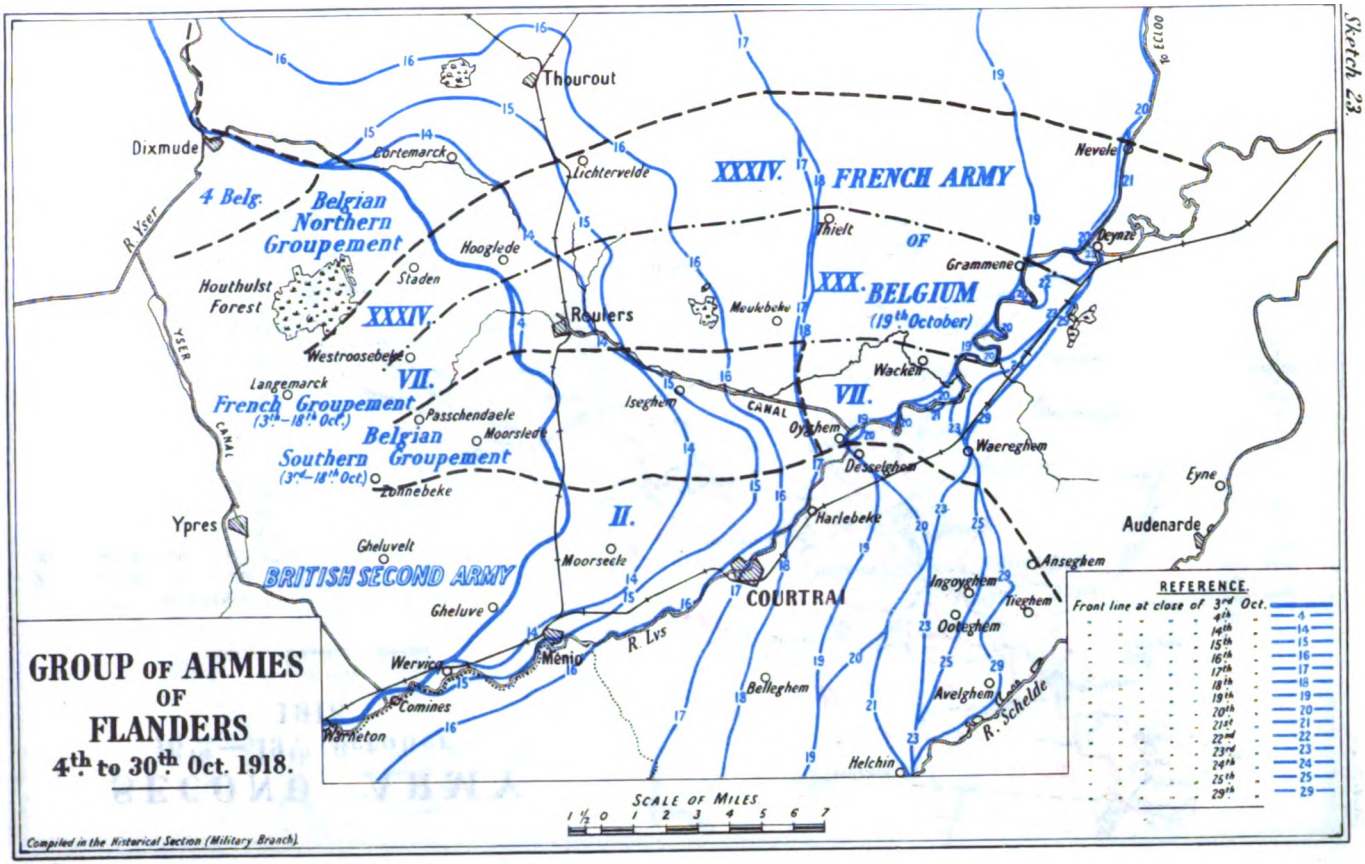


Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Digitized by Google

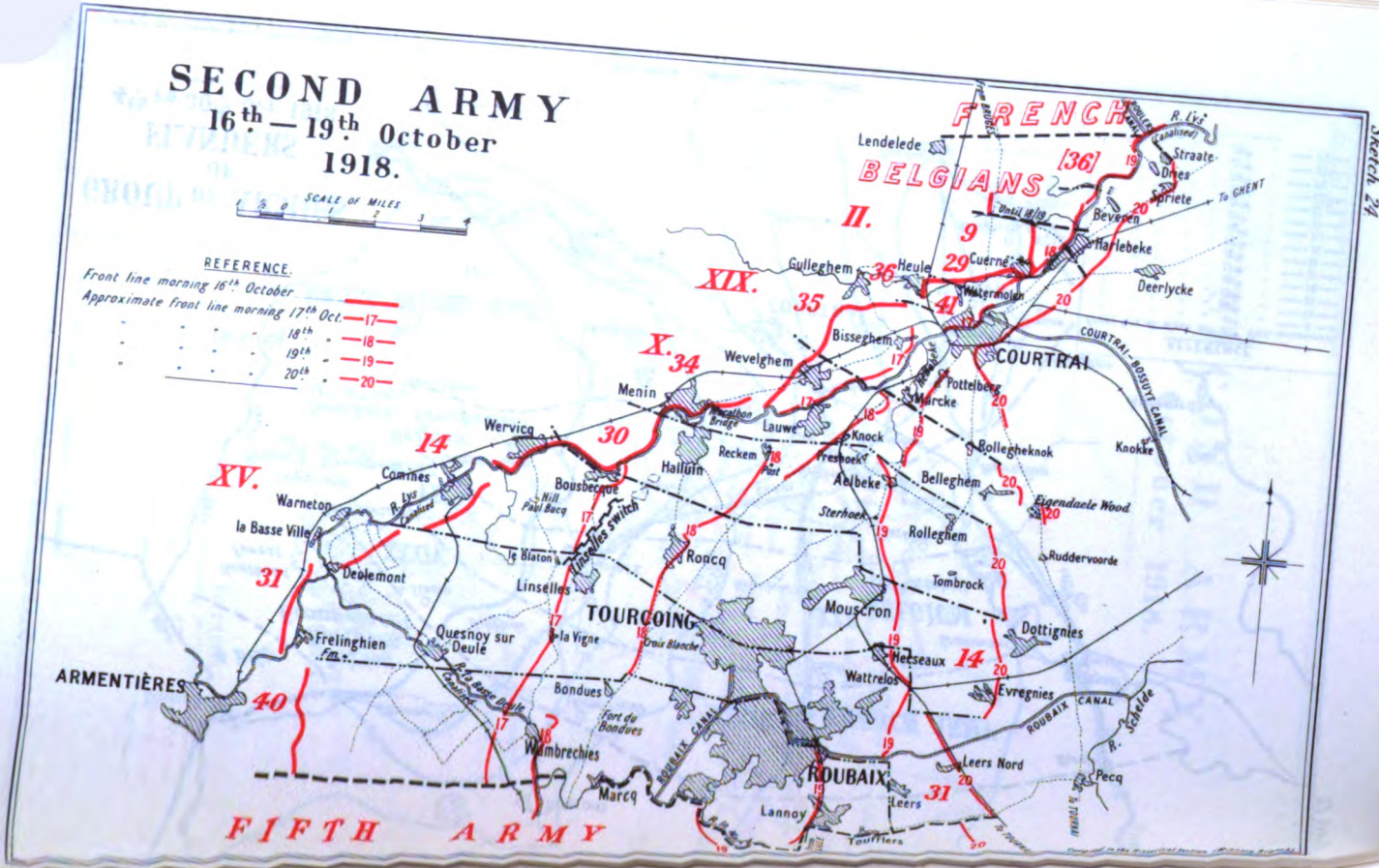


Digitized by Google



3269/4

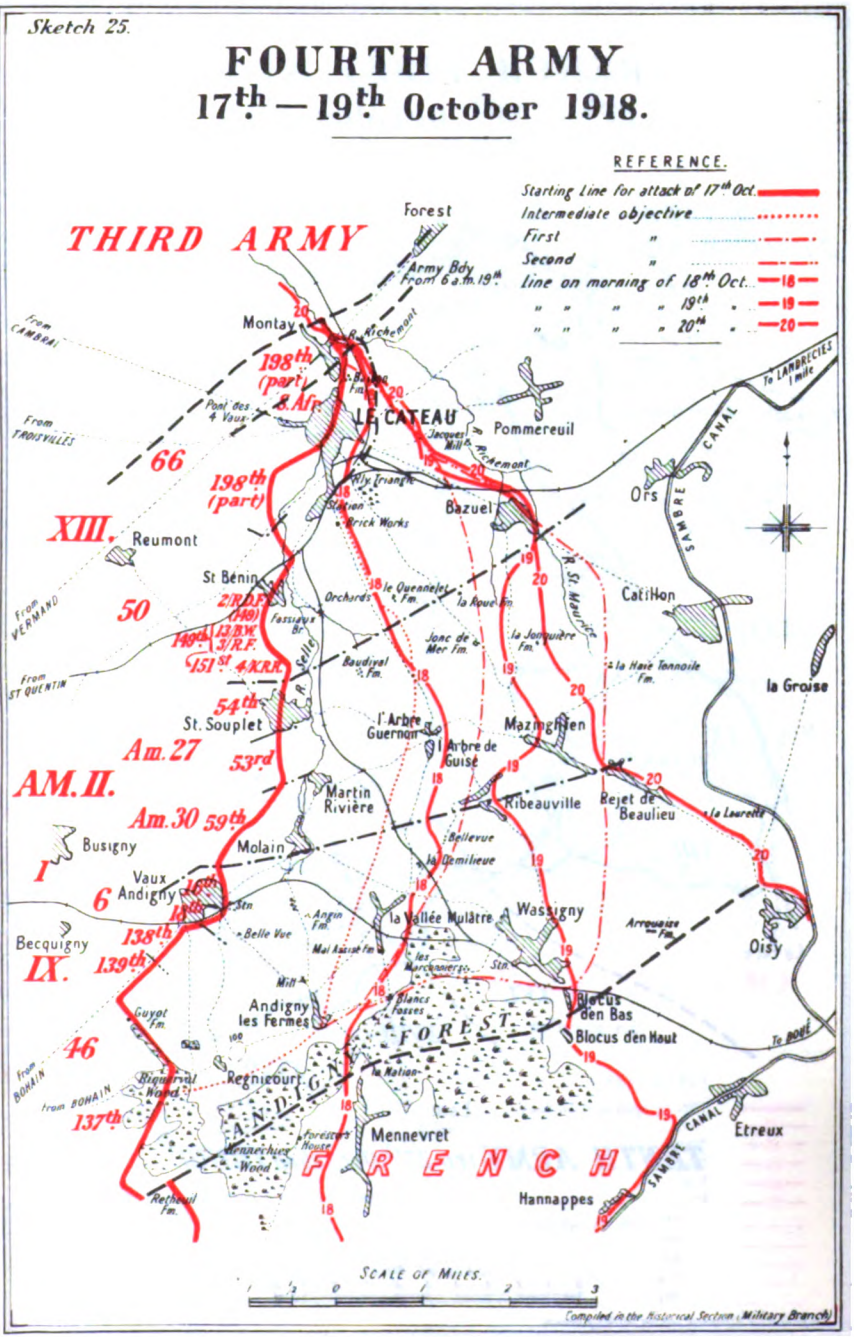
Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

Sketch 25.

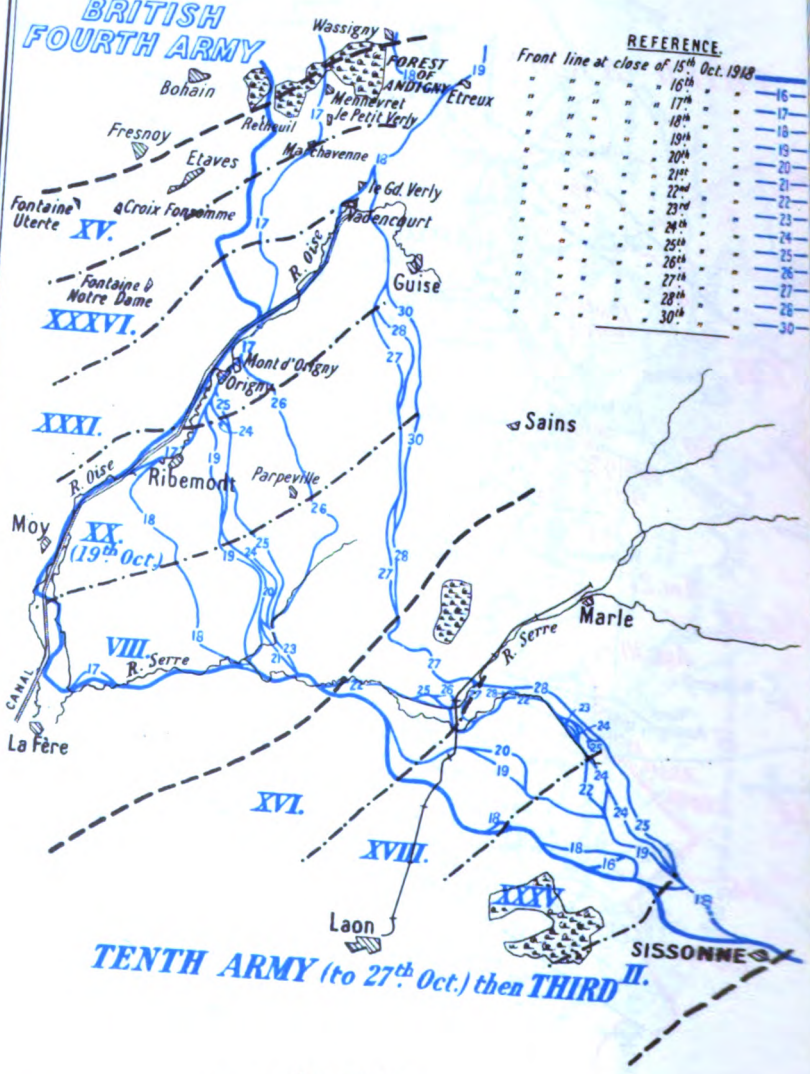
FOURTH ARMY
17th — 19th October 1918.



Digitized by Google

Sketch 26.

FRENCH FIRST ARMY
15th to 31st October 1918.

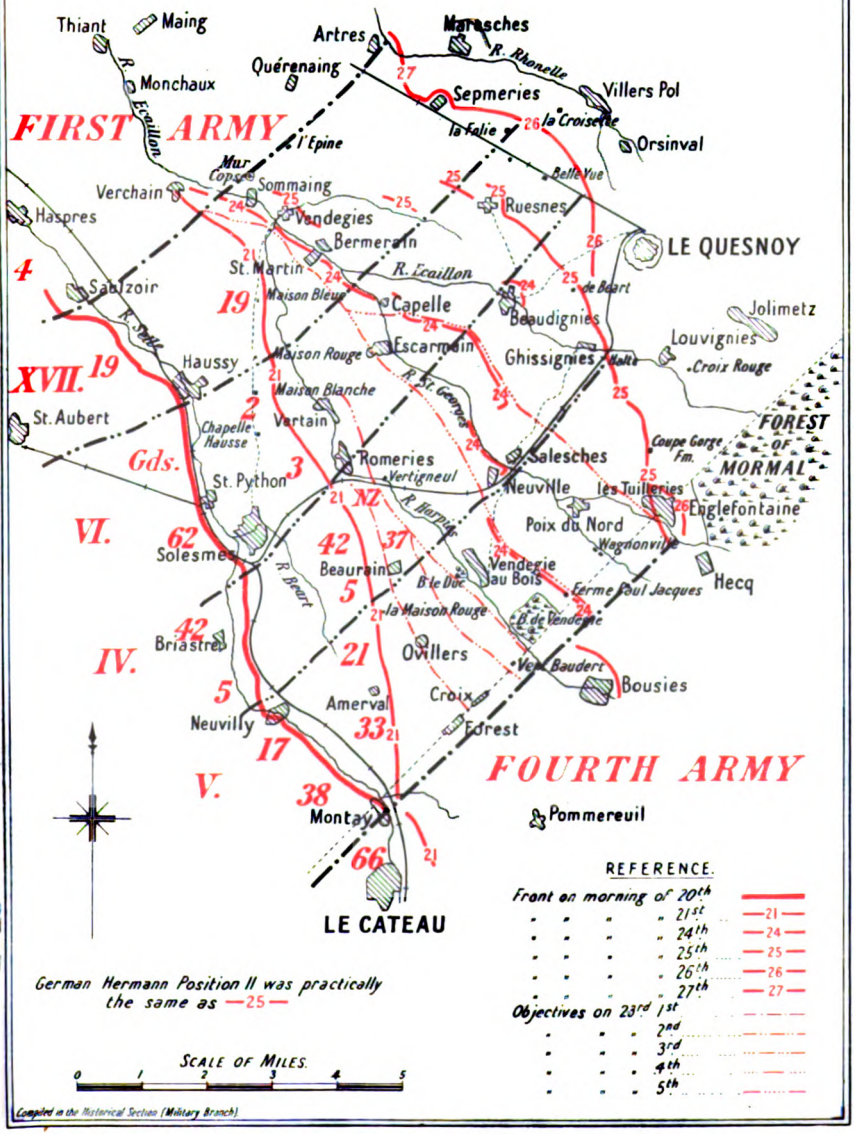


Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Digitized by Google

Sketch 27.

THIRD ARMY
20th — 24th October 1918.

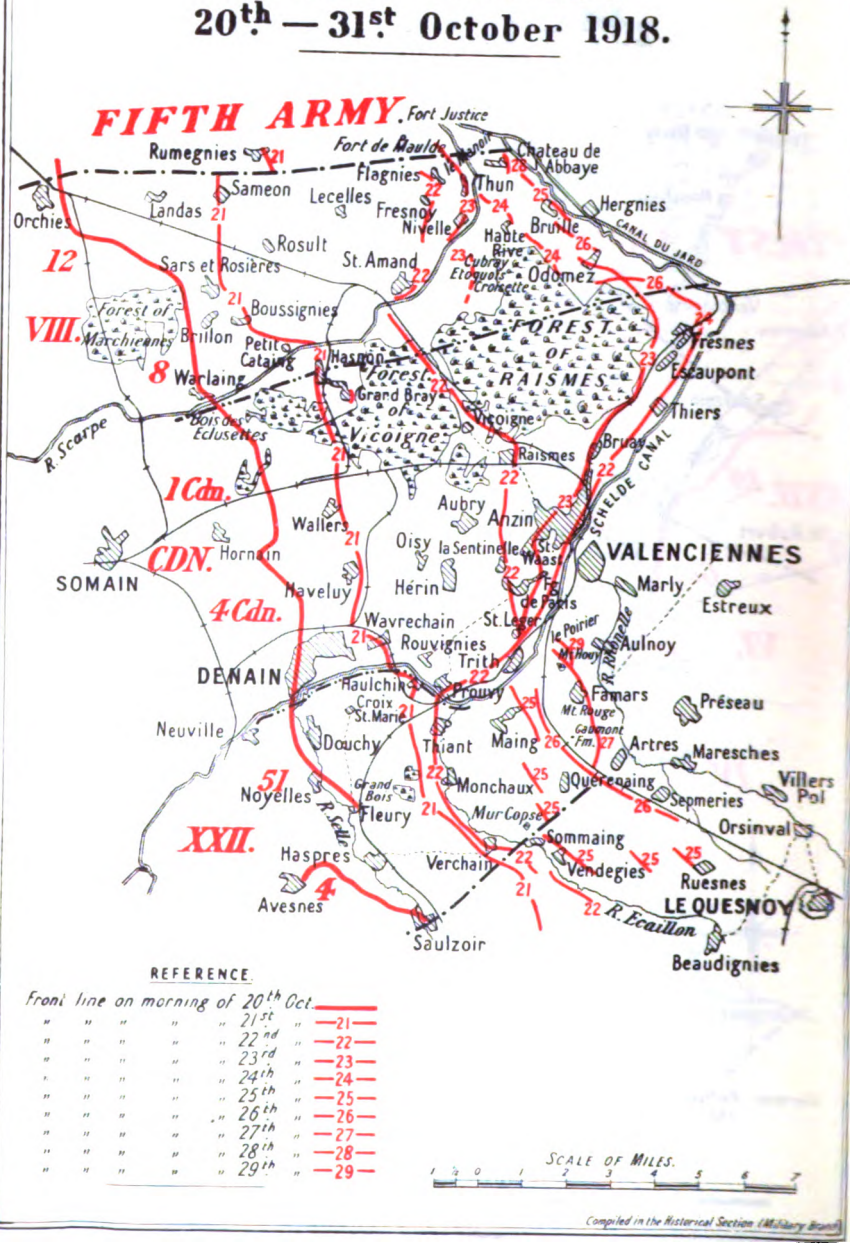


Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Digitized by Google

Sketch 28.

FIRST ARMY
20th — 31st October 1918.



REFERENCE.

Front line on morning of 20th Oct. —21—
" " " " " 21st " —22—
" " " " " 22nd " —23—
" " " " " 23rd " —24—
" " " " " 24th " —25—
" " " " " 25th " —26—
" " " " " 26th " —27—
" " " " " 27th " —28—
" " " " " 28th " —29—

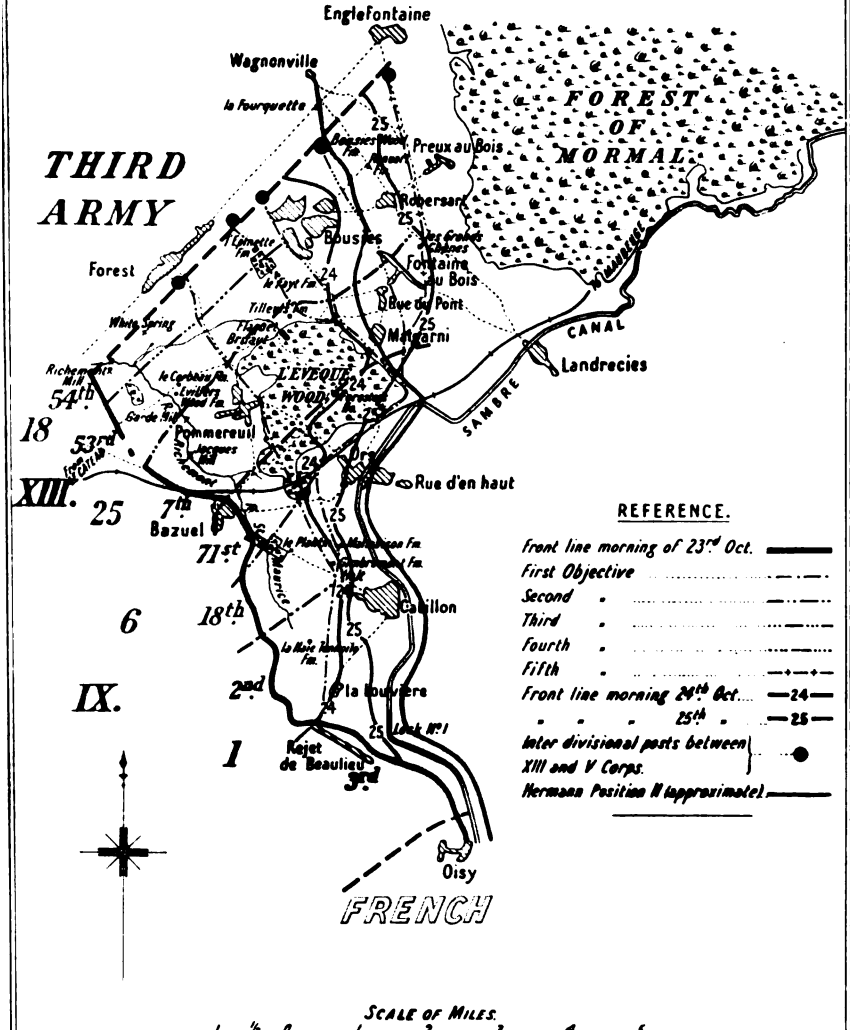
SCALE OF MILES.
1 ½ 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Digitized by Google

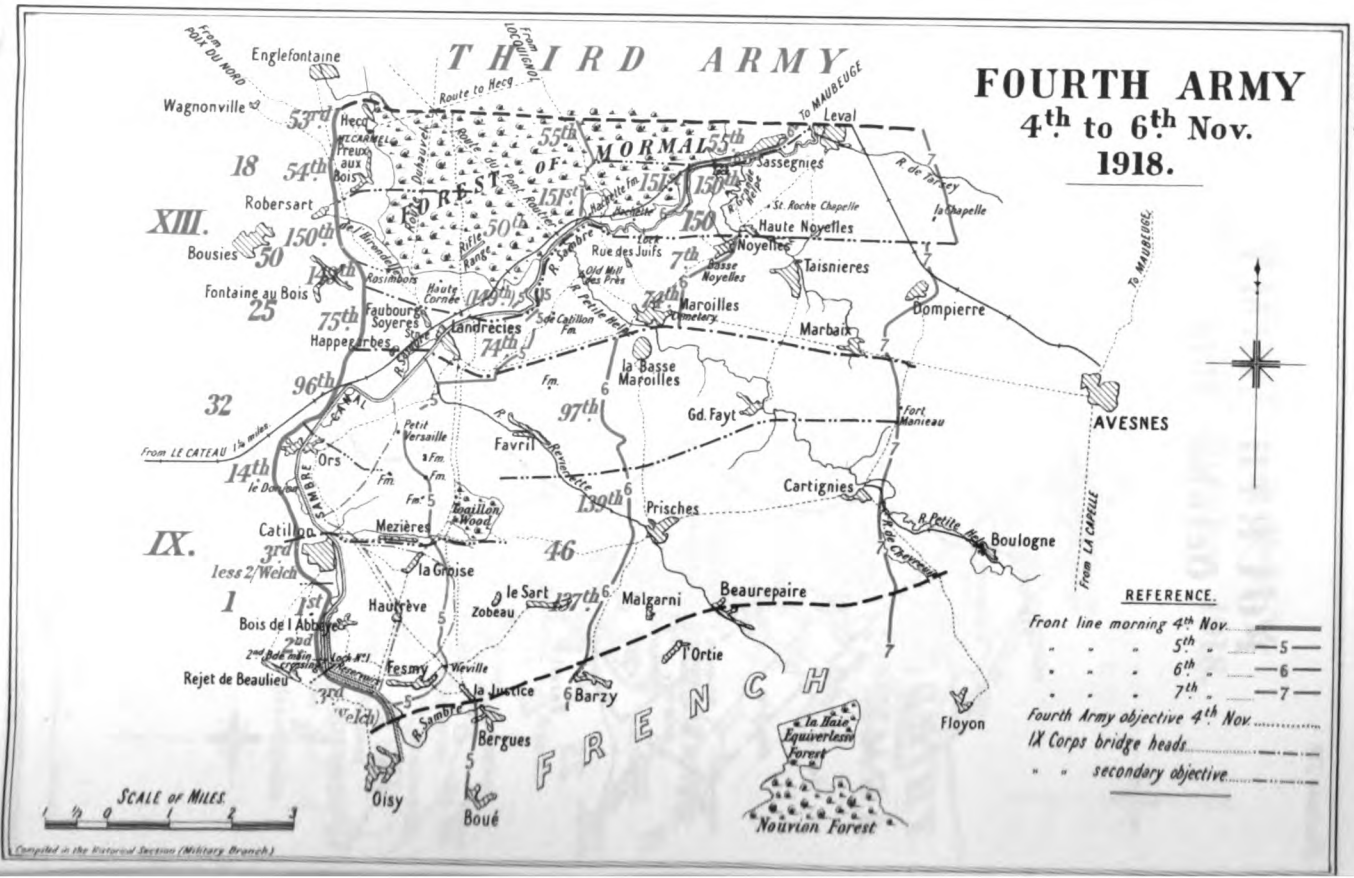
Sketch 29.

FOURTH ARMY
October 1918.

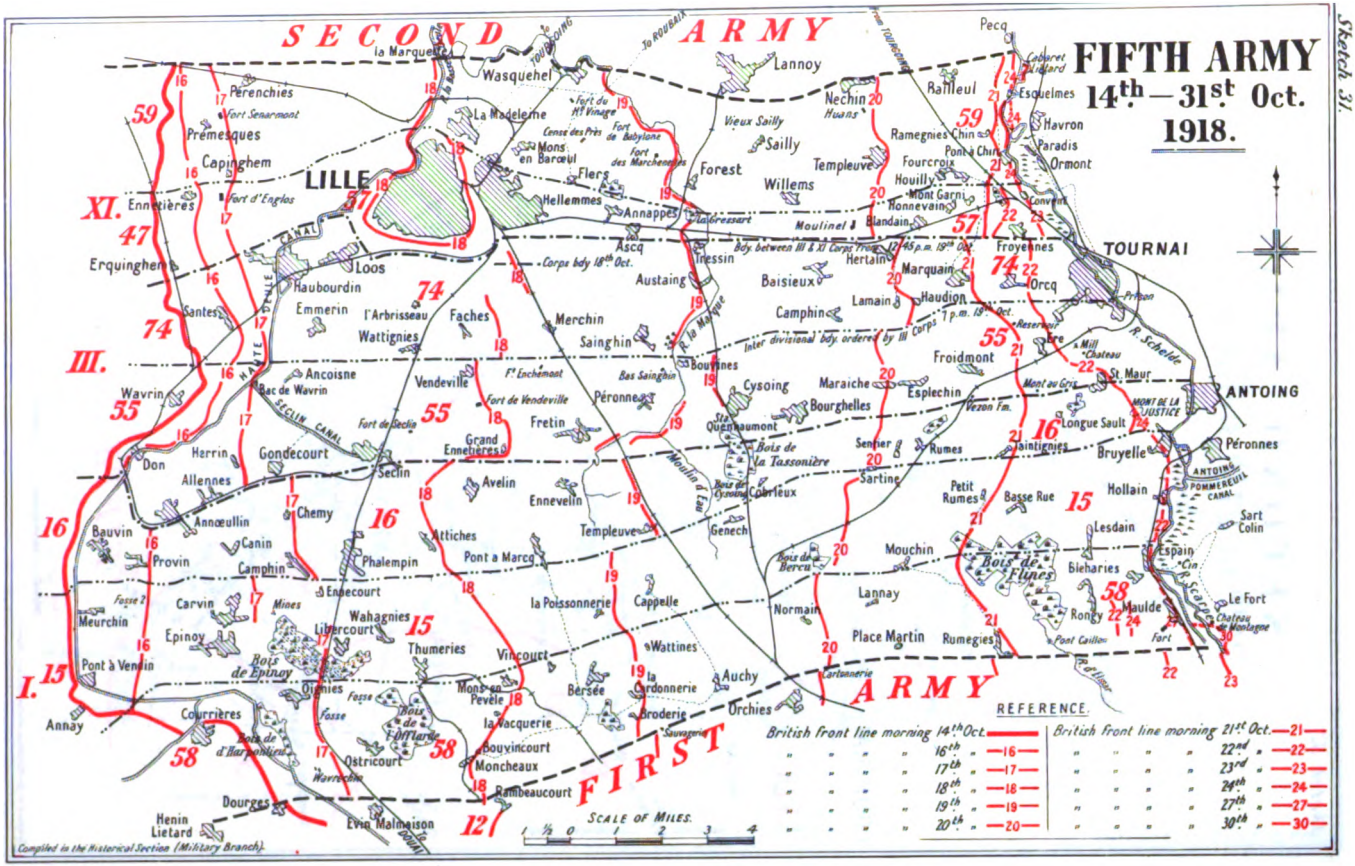


Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch).

Digitized by Google

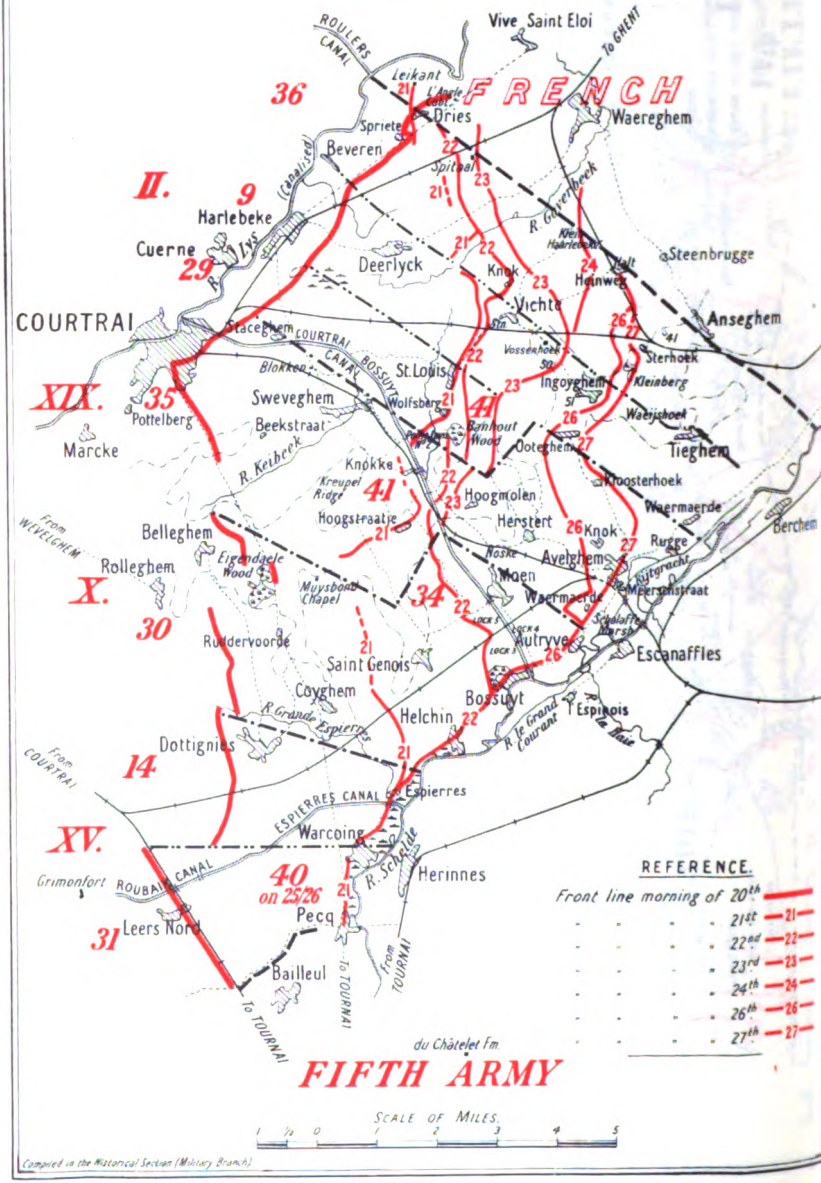

FOURTH ARMY
4th to 6th Nov.
1918.
THIRD ARMY
FRENCH
Englefontaine
Wagnonville
Hecq
Preux aux Bois
Robersart
Bousies
Fontaine au Bois
Happegarbes
Faubourg Soyeres
Landrecies
Petit Versailles
Ors
Catillon
Mezières
la Groise
Hautrève
Bois de l'Abbaye
Rejet de Beaulieu
Fesmy
Vieville
la Justice
Bergues
Oisy
Boué
le Sart
Zobeau
Malgarni
Beaurepaire
Ortie
Barzy
Floyon
la Haie Equiverlesse Forest
Nouvion Forest
Favril
Prisches
Cartignies
Marbaix
Dompierre
Boulogne
AVESNES
Haute Noyelles
Noyelles
Basse Noyelles
Taisnieres
Sassegnies
Leval
Maroilles
la Basse Maroilles
Gd. Fayt
Fort Manteau
Rue des Juifs
Old Mill des Près
Haute Cornée
Rosimbois
Rifle Rang
Bois de l'Hirondelle
Bois Confrey
Bois Dossard
Route du Pont Rouge
Route to Hecq
Route to Leval
Route to Maubeuge
Route to Avesnes
Route to Boulogne
Route to Landrecies
Route to Prisches
Route to Favril
Route to Ors
Route to Oisy
Route to Boué
Route to Barzy
Route to Floyon
Route to Nouvion Forest
Route to Malgarni
Route to Beaurepaire
Route to Cartignies
Route to Marbaix
Route to Dompierre
Route to Taisnieres
Route to Haute Noyelles
Route to Noyelles
Route to Sassegnies

Sketch 31.


FIFTH ARMY
14th — 31st Oct.
1918.
SECOND ARMY
FIRST ARMY
LILLE
TOURNAI
ANTOING
Pecq
Lannoy
Wasquehal
Perenchies
Prémesques
Capinghem
Ennetières
Erquinghem
Loos
Haubourdin
Emmerin
Wattignies
Santes
Faches
Merchin
Sainghin
Wavrin
Ancoisne
Bac de Wavrin
Vendeville
Fretin
Péronne
Gondecourt
Herrin
Don
Allennes
Seclin
Grand Ennetières
Avelin
Ennevelin
Chemy
Annœullin
Bauvin
Provin
Canin
Camphin
Phalempin
Attiches
Templeuve
Pont a Marcq
Carvin
Epinoy
Meurchin
Pont à Vendin
Annay
Courrières
Dourges
Henin Lietard
Evin Malmaison
Oignies
Libercourt
Wahagnies
Thumeries
Vincourt
Mons-en-Pevèle
la Vacquerie
Bouvincourt
Moncheaux
Rumbeaucourt
Ostricourt
Bois de Phalempin
Bois de Flines
Bois de Berclau
Bois de Cysoing
Bois de la Tassonière
Mouchin
Lannay
Normain
Place Martin
Rumegies
Auchy
Orchies
Wattines
la Cordonnerie
la Broderie
Bersée
Cappelle
la Poissonnerie
Genech
Cysoing
Bourghelles
Maraiche
Esplechin
Froidmont
Bouvines
Camphin
Baisieux
Marquain
Haudion
Orcq
Froyennes
Hertain
Willems
Forest
Templeuve
Fourcroix
Houilly
Mont Garni
Bonnevain
Blandain
Ramegnies Chin
Pont à Chin
Esquelmes
Havron
Paradis
Ormont
Rameilul
Nechin
Huons
Vieux Sailly
Sailly
Annappes
Hellemmes
Flers
Ascq
Tressin
Austaing
Lamain
Rumes
Petit Rumes
Basse Rue
Sartine
Senlier
Longue Sault
Taintignies
Bruyelle
Hollain
Lesdain
Espain
Bieharies
Rongy
Maulde
Le Fort
Sart Colin
Péronnes
St. Maur
Mont de la Justice
Mont au Gres
Vezon Fm.
Prison
Reservoir
Mill
Château
R. Scheldt
Canal de l'Espierre
Pommereuil Canal
Canal de la Haute Deule
Canal de la Basse Deule
Canal de la Lys
Canal de Seclin
Canal de la Marque
Canal de Roubaix
Canal de Tourcoing
Moulin d'Avelin
Fort de Mt Vinaigre
Fort de Babylone
Fort des Marchenelles
Fort d'Englos
Fort Senarmont
Fort de Vendeville
Fort de Seclin
Fort de la Redoute
Fort de Maulde
Château de Montagne
Cabaret Dédard
Corps bdy 18th Oct.
Inter divisional bdy. ordered by III Corps
7 p.m. 18th Oct.
Bdy. between III & XI Corps from 12.45 p.m. 19th Oct.
Moulinel
la Foresart
Mont de Cats
Mont des Recollets
Mont Noir
Mont Kemmel
Mont Rouge
Mont Cassel
Mont des Cats
Mont de Watten
Mont Watten
Mont Noir
Mont Rouge
Mont Kemmel

Sketch 32.

SECOND ARMY
20th to 27th October 1918.



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3269/3

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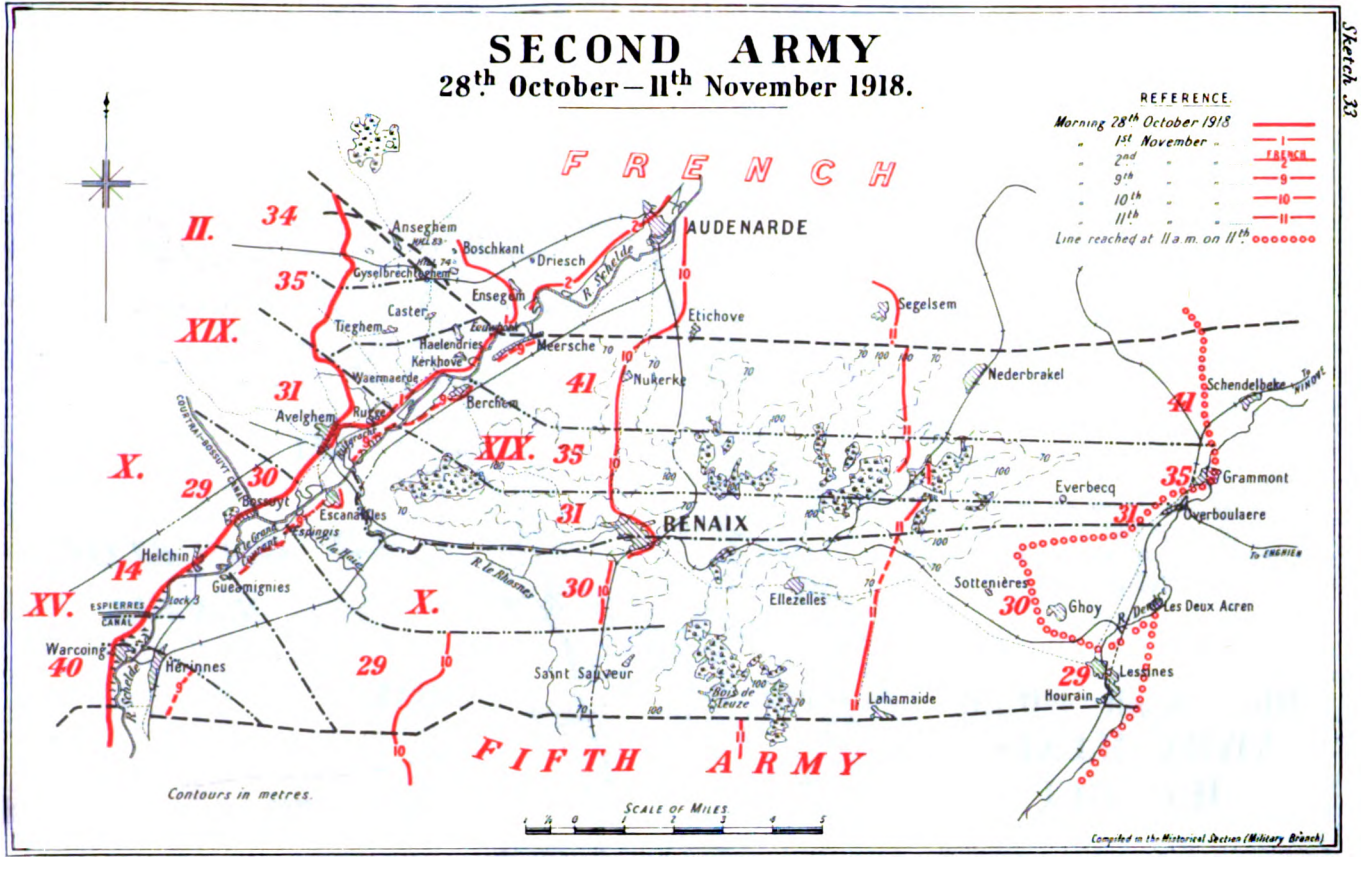
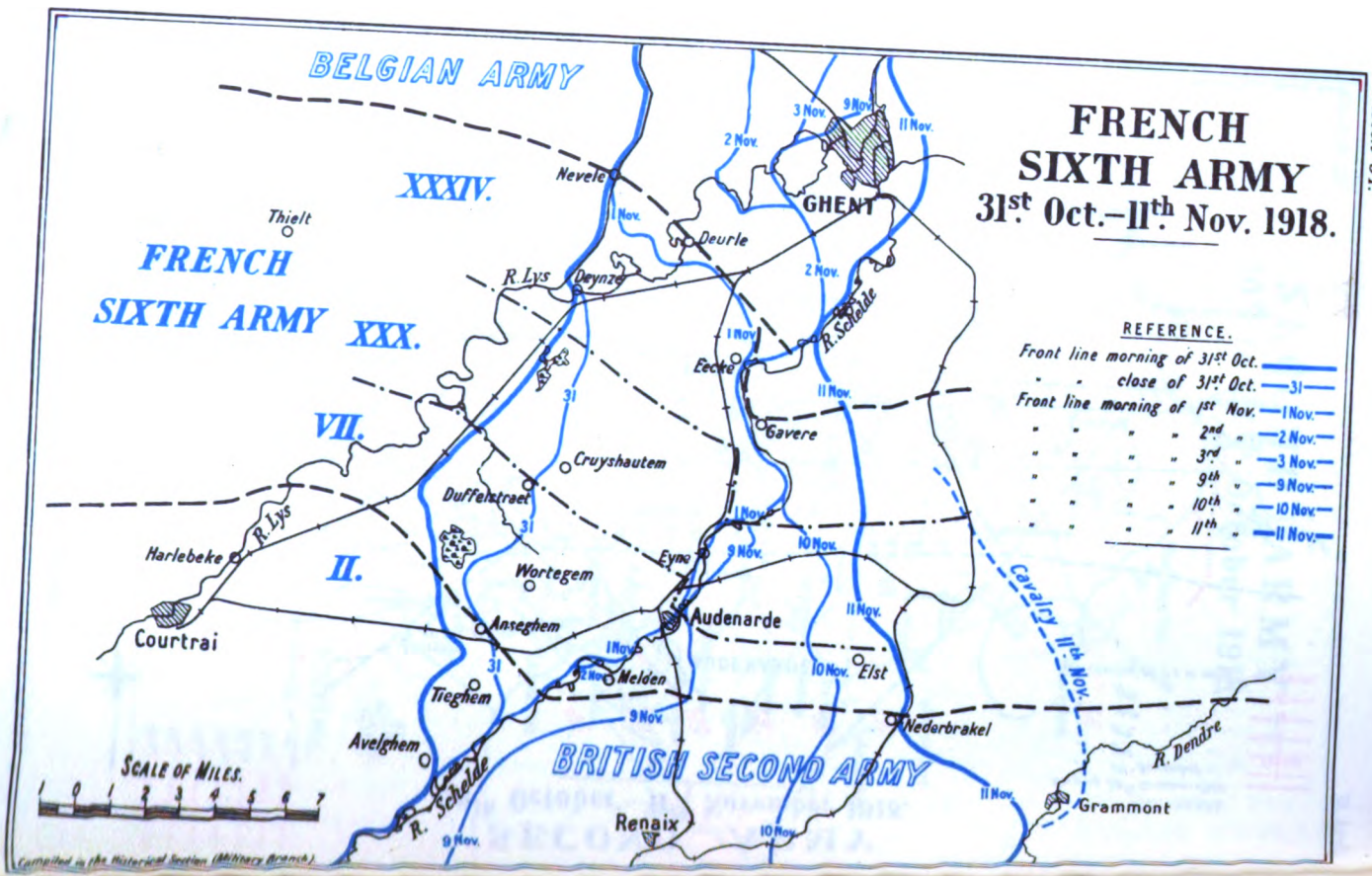
SECOND ARMY

28th October — 11th November 1918.



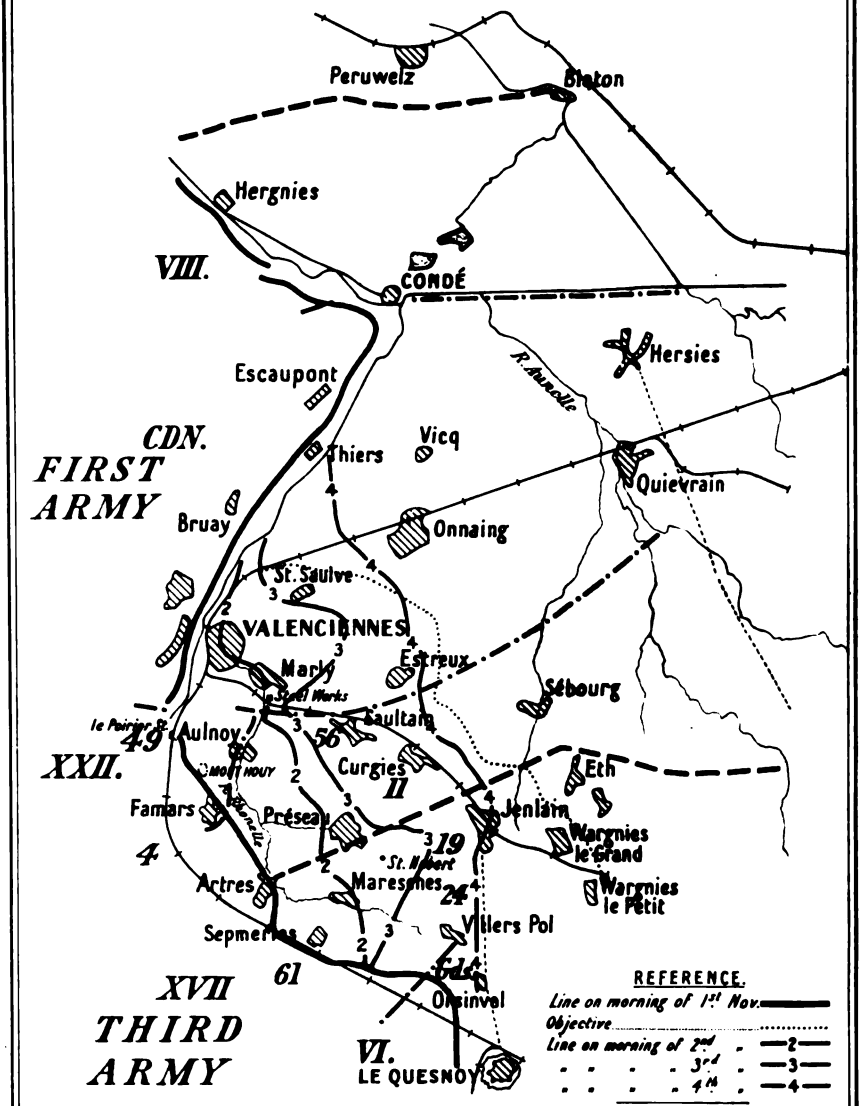
Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

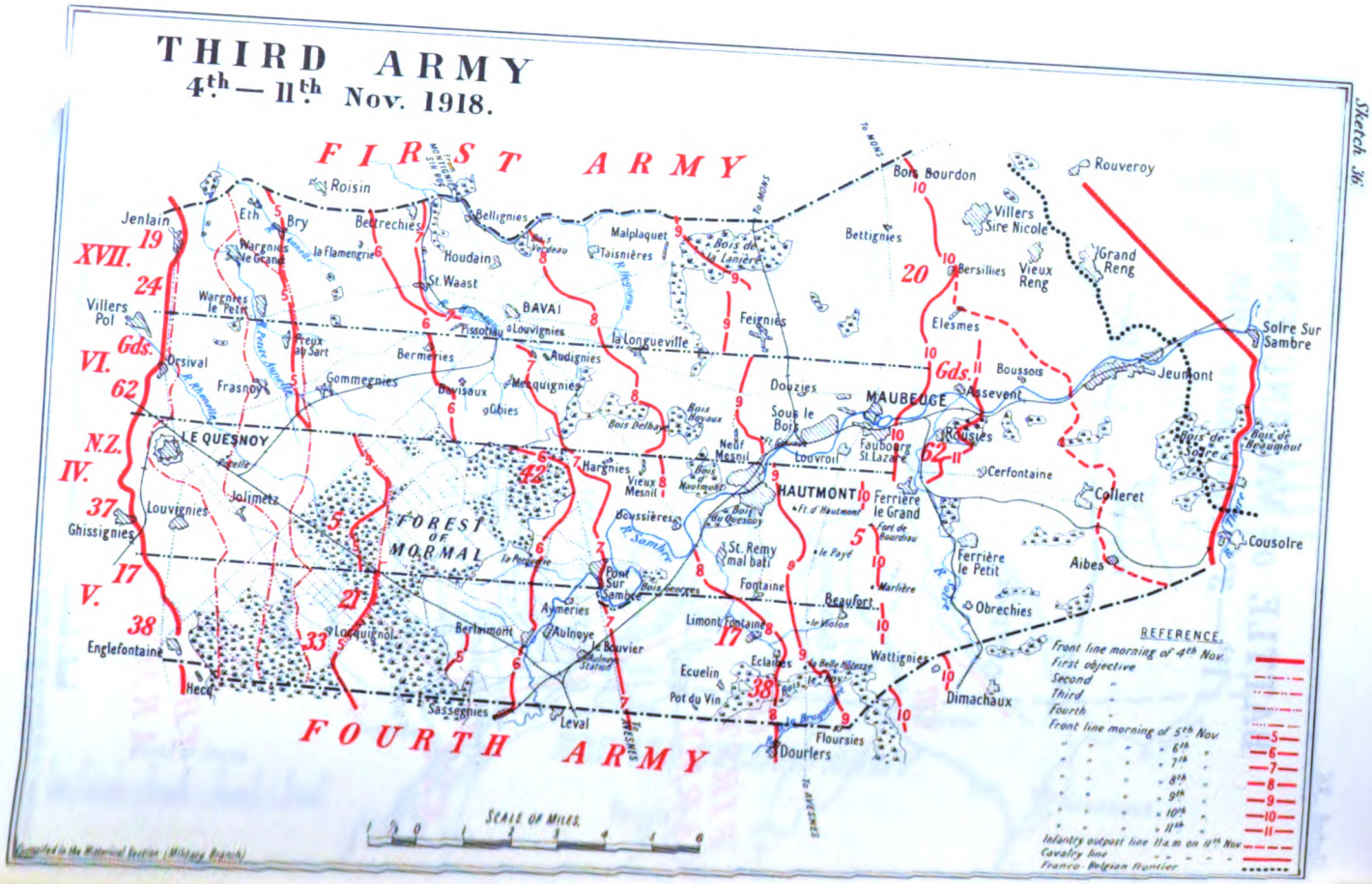
Sketch 35.

BATTLE OF VALENCIENNES
1st — 3rd November 1918.

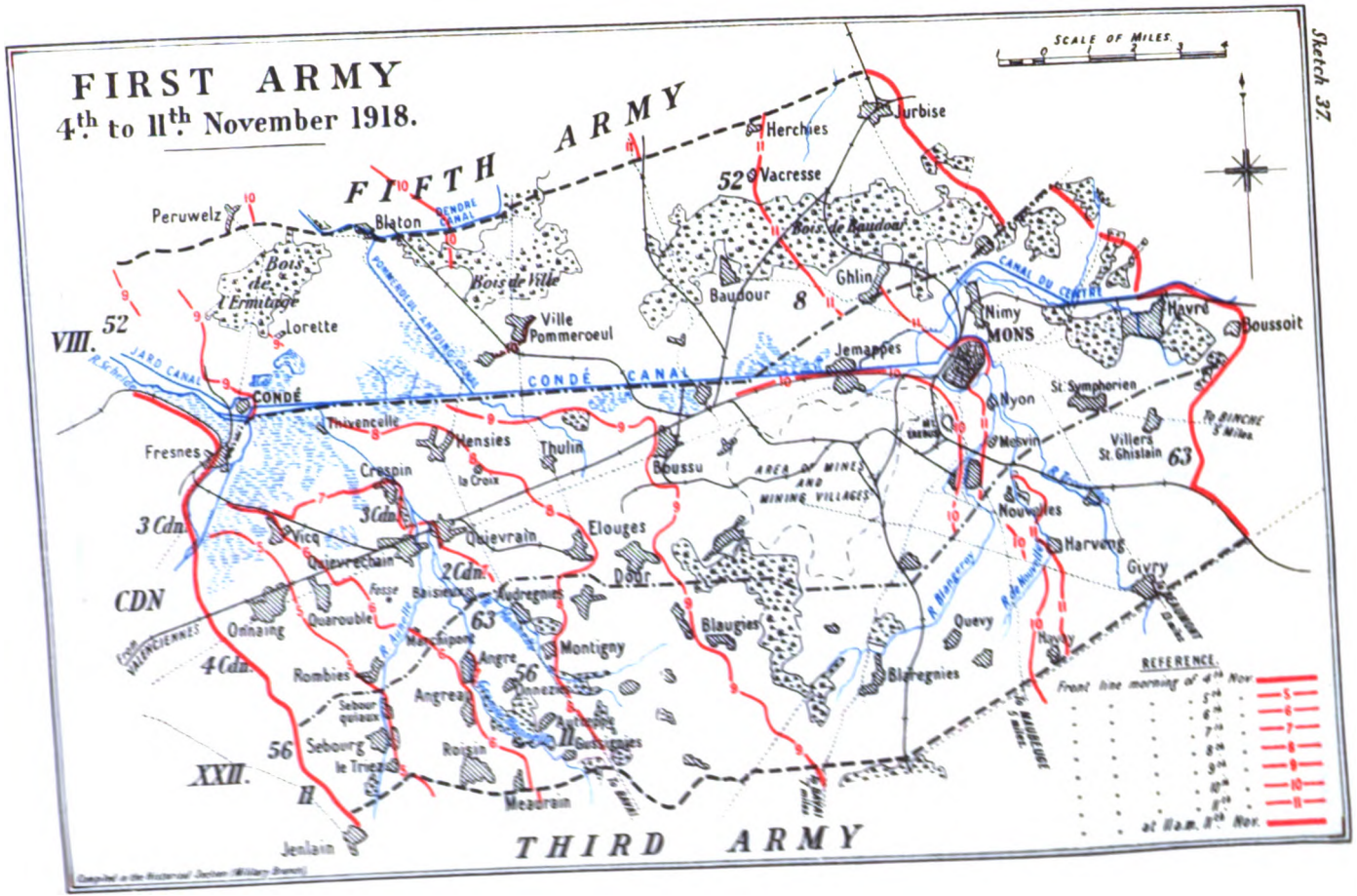


Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

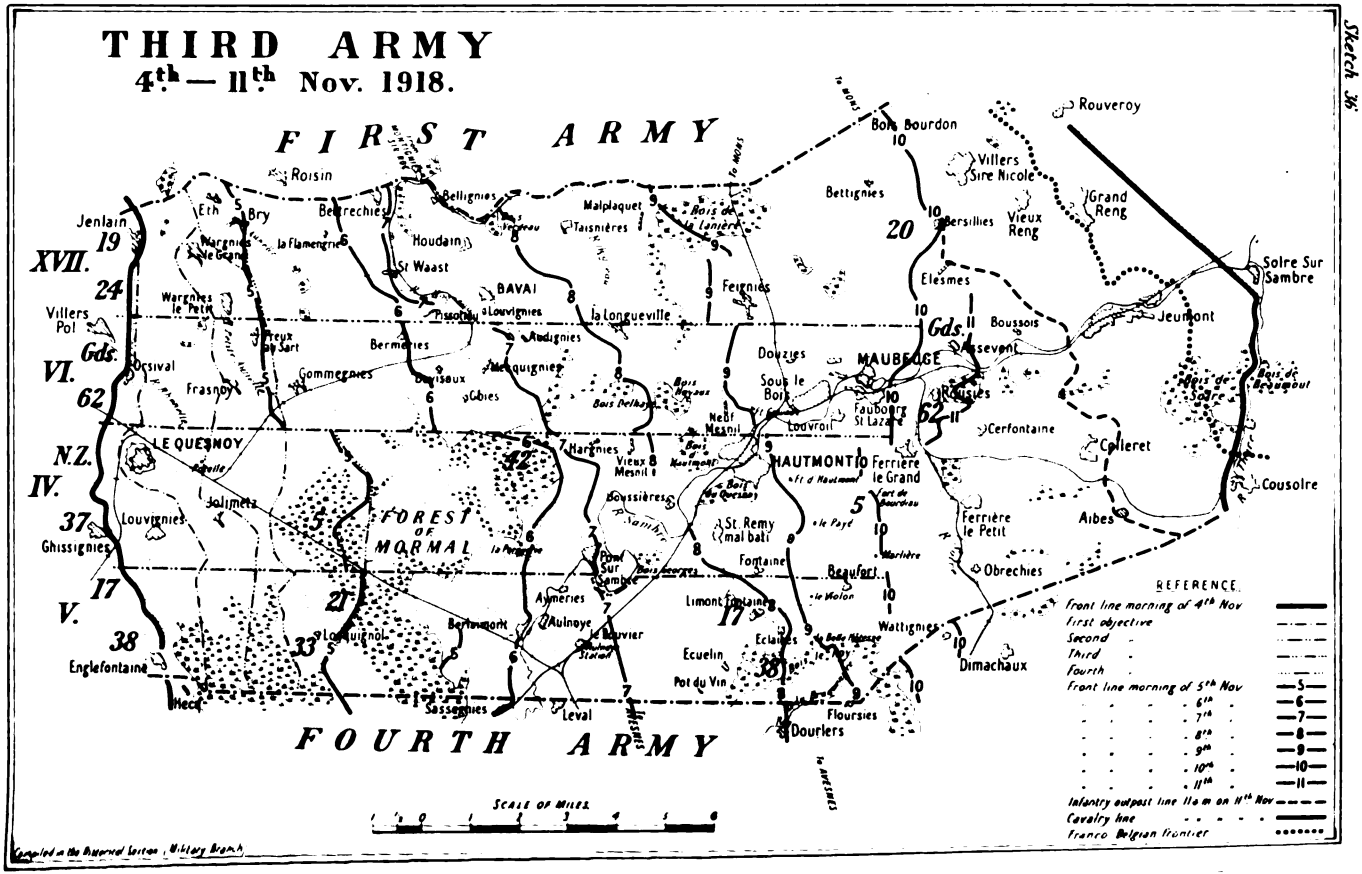
Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

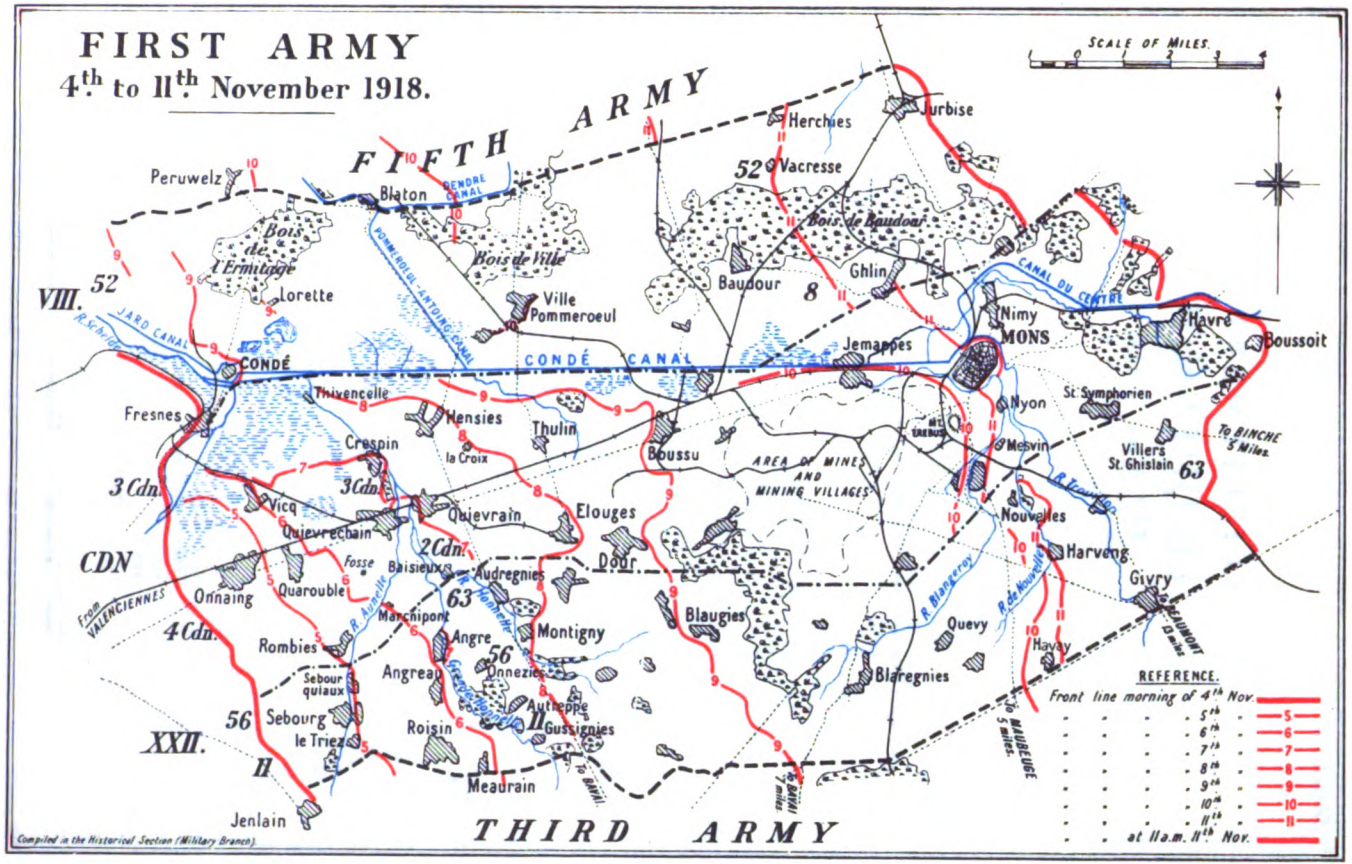


Digitized by Google



Sketch 36

Digitized by Google



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch).

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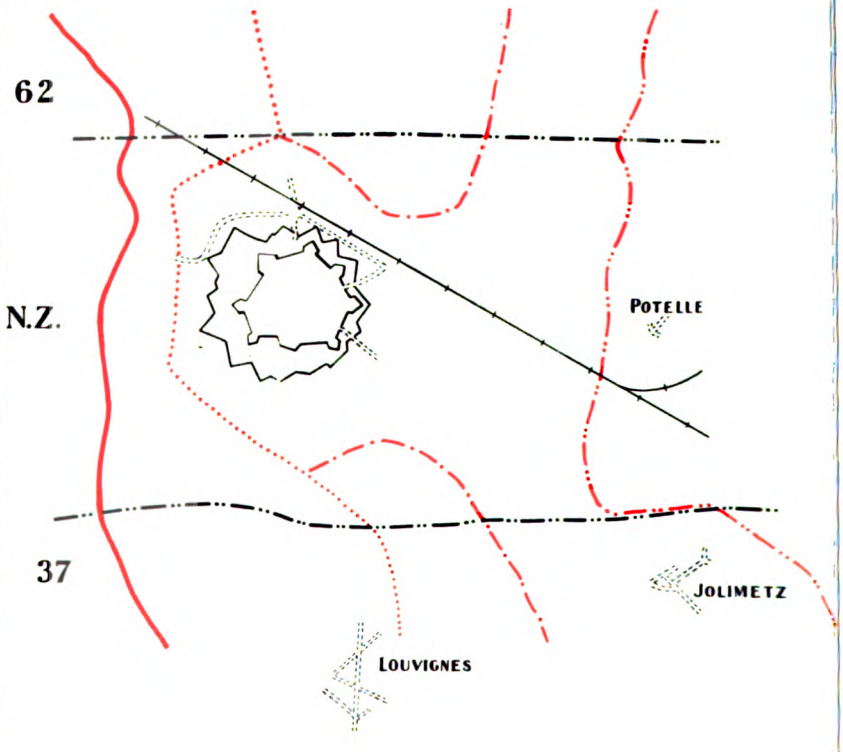
Sketch 38.

ENCIRCLEMENT OF LE QUESNOY

4th Nov. 1918.



REFERENCE.

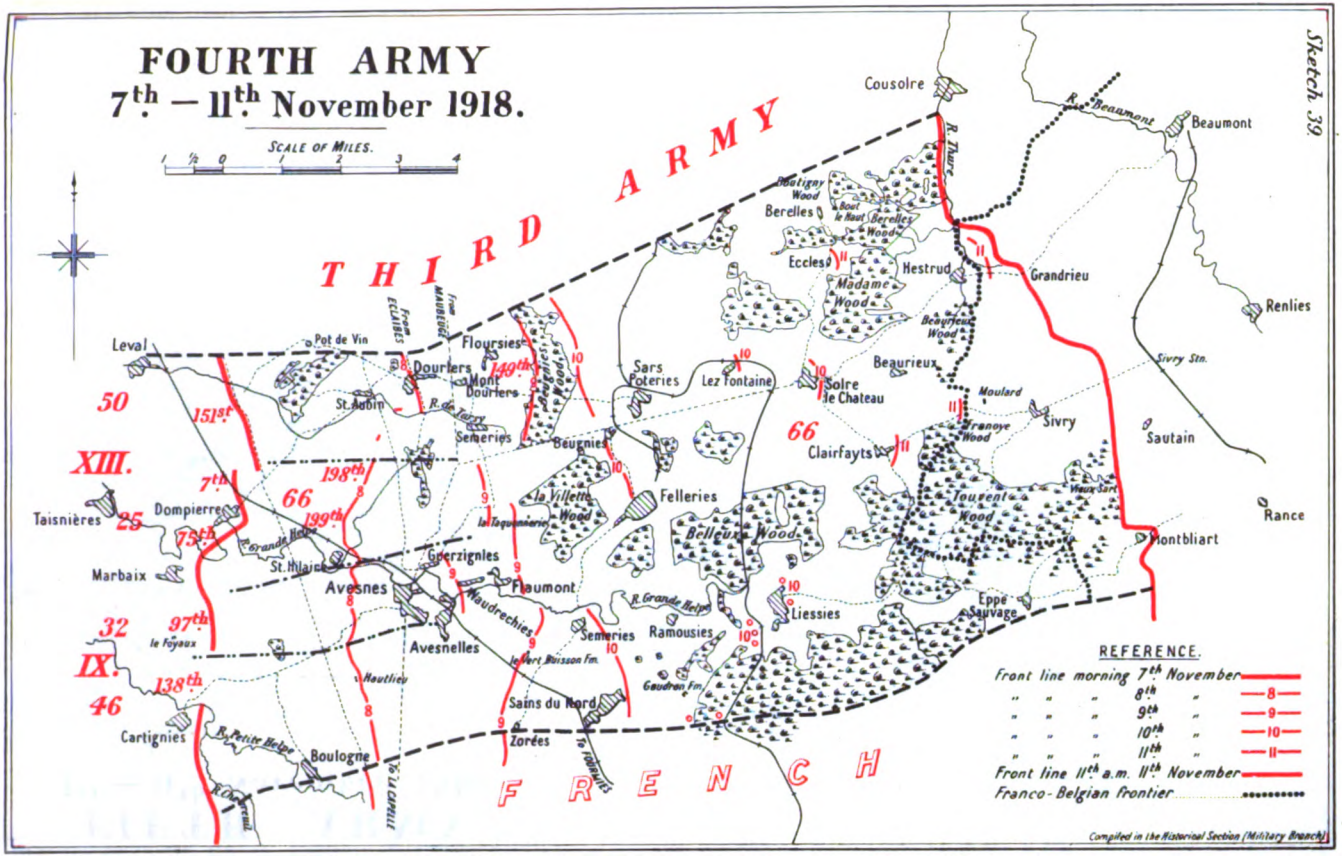
Front line
Preliminary objective
First "
Second "

SCALE OF YARDS

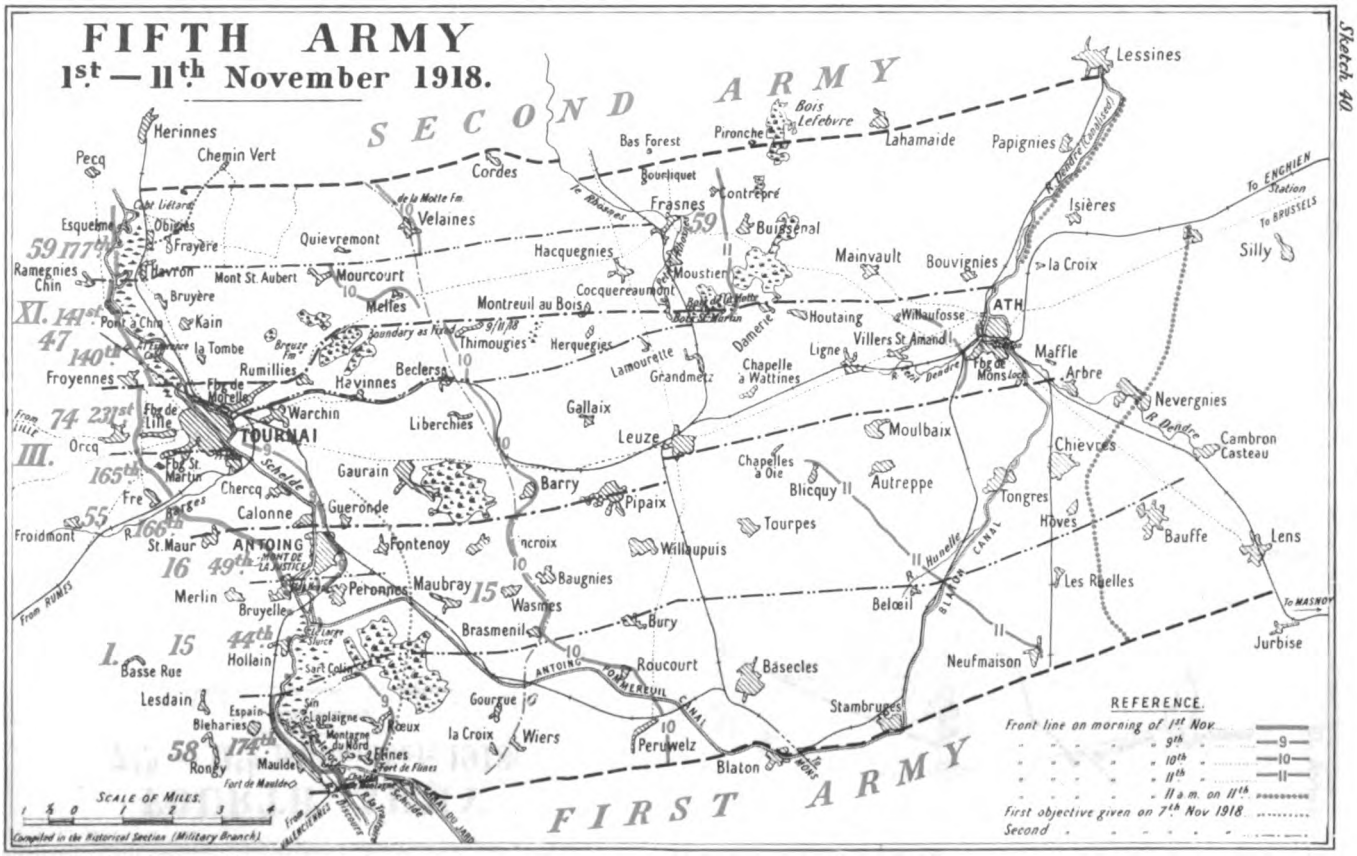
500 250 0 500 1000 1500 2000 2500

Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google


FIFTH ARMY
1st — 11th November 1918.
SECOND ARMY
FIRST ARMY
Lessines
Herinnes
Pecq
Chemin Vert
Cordes
Bois Lefebvre
Bas Forest
Pironche
Lahamaide
Papignies
Bourlquet
Contrepré
Frasnes
Buissenal
Isières
Esquelmes
Velaines
Quievremont
Hacquegnies
Mainvault
Bouvignies
la Croix
Silly
Ramegnies Chin
Mont St. Aubert
Mourcourt
Melles
Moustier
Cocquereaumont
Montreuil au Bois
Houtaing
Villers St. Amand
ATH
Maffle
Froyennes
Rumillies
Havinnes
Beclersa
Thimougies
Herquegies
Lamourette
Grandmetz
Chapelle à Wattines
Arbre
Nevergnies
Warchin
TOURNAI
Liberchies
Gallaix
Leuze
Moulbaix
Chievres
Cambron Casteau
Orcq
Gaurain
Barry
Pipaix
Chapelles à Oie
Blicquy
Autreppe
Tongres
Froidmont
Calonne
Gueronde
Fontenoy
Tourpes
Hoves
Bauffe
Lens
ANTOING
Willaupuis
Maubray
Baugnies
Wasmes
Bury
Merlin
Bruyelle
Peronnes
Brasmenil
Belœil
Les Ruelles
Jurbise
Basse Rue
Hollain
Roucourt
Basecles
Neufmaison
Lesdain
Espaing
Bleharies
Gourgue
Stambruges
Rongy
Maulde
Wiers
Peruwelz
Blaton
REFERENCE.
Front line on morning of 1st Nov.
" " " 9th "
" " " 10th "
" " " 11th "
" " " 11 a.m. on 11th
First objective given on 7th Nov 1918.
Second " " " " "
SCALE OF MILES.
Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch).
Sketch 40

To renew the charge, book must be [redacted] desk.

TWO WEEK BOOK

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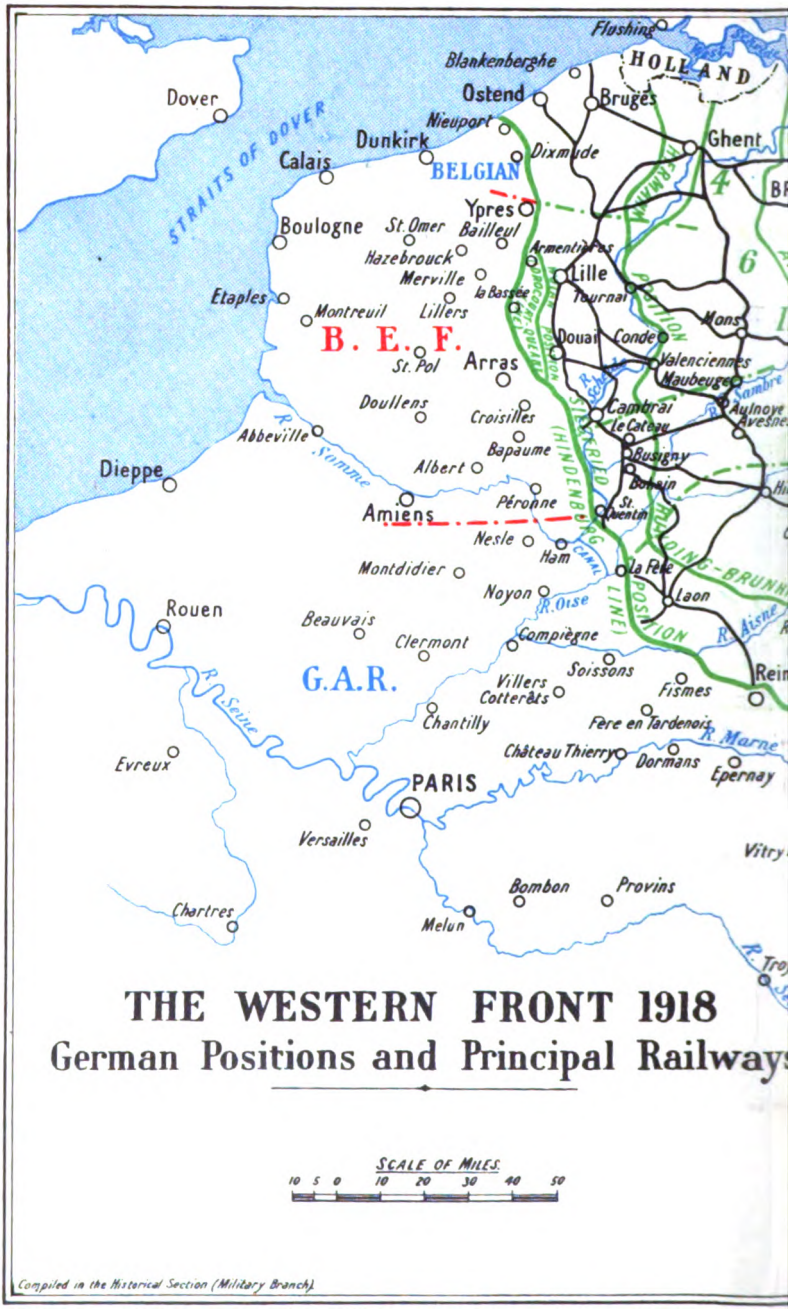

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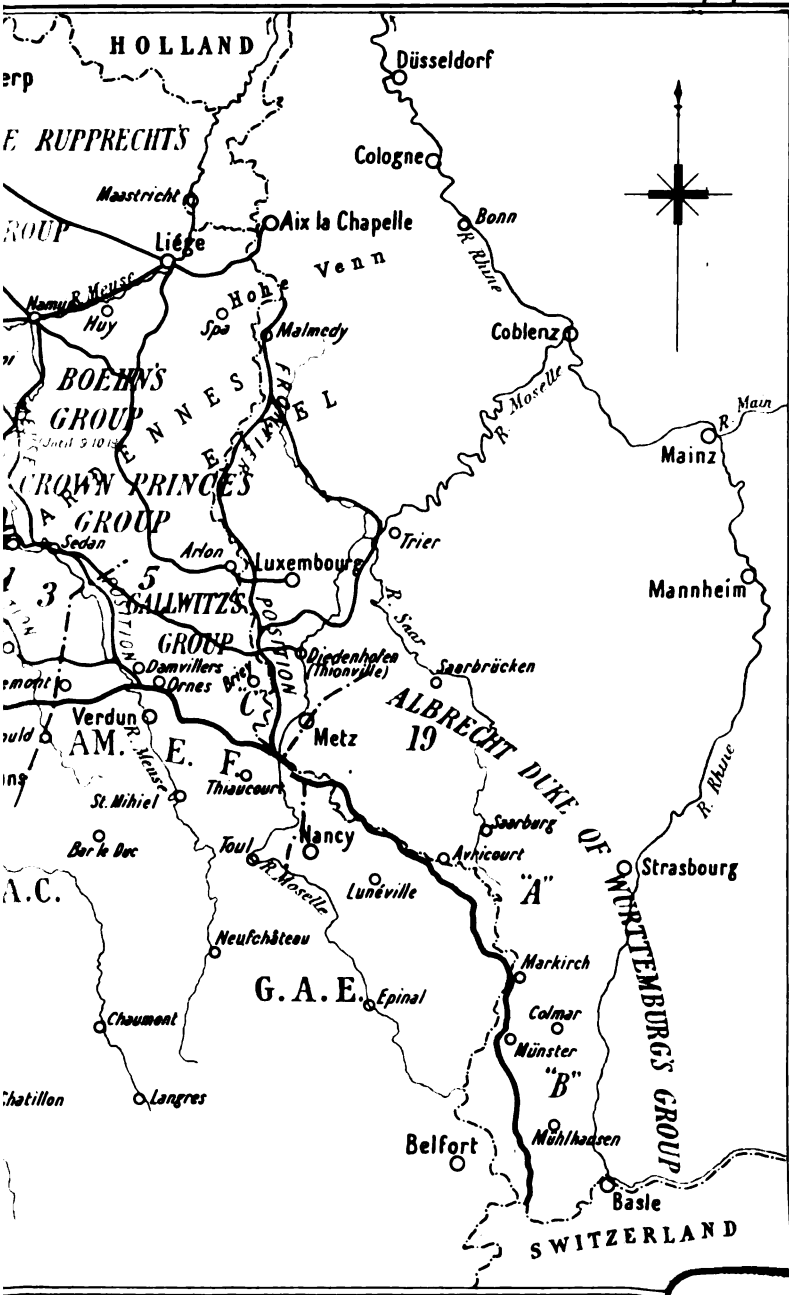

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